THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER:

PASTORAL COUNSELING OF A TRADITIONAL FAMILY

OF A LESBIAN DAUGHTER

A THESIS

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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To Dawn, my best friend and life partner.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then,
I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

—Ephesians 4:1-4

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Traditional Christians are struggling to hold fast to a biblical perspective on the issue of homosexuality. The situation is complicated as individuals come to know, through work or school, people who display homosexual behaviors. The struggle comes as the result of two conflicting ideas: the biblical teachings opposing homosexual activity and the relational experiences connecting people together. As a result, severe stress comes when a member of a traditional Christian family announces they are homosexual.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate an approach to counseling families in distress that is both biblically sound and psychologically effective. The approach will be integrative, applying a theologically supported, structural relations oriented approach looking at the context of the family. It will also apply a psychoeducational approach to help the family reframe their situation from a biblical/theological perspective and an attachment theory approach in helping the family to balance their need for attachment and individuation.

INTRODUCTION

Across the range of sources on the topic of homosexuality there appears to be two main perspectives: individual or social. Within these contexts, whether from a secular or biblical perspective, writers seem most interested in dealing with how a person comes to be homosexually oriented or how society responds to them. However, in comparison to the sea of literature dealing with the issues surrounding homosexuality, very few resources deal with the parents' perspective. It is the hope of this author to add to the discussion another voice in an effort to expand our understanding of the topic.

Additionally, research suggests that the majority of families who sought help for mental health related issues, sought that help from a pastor (Farrell & Goebert, 2008); therefore, the pastor was seen as the first line of support for the Christian family. The problem is that most pastors do not feel prepared for the task of counseling (Weaver, Koenig & Ochberg, 1996). The hope is that this and other publications like it will offer some useful resources for pastors who are seeking to provide help to families in need. In this way the faith community can support parents seeking answers.

This thesis emerged from the study of a Christian family. From a counseling perspective, the investigation was entered into with no predetermined expectations; rather, the author allowed the development of his understanding of this family to provide him direction for further in-depth inquiry. As he worked with this family, he observed a major event in their lives: the youngest daughter disclosed her lesbian orientation to her parents. This experience placed significant stress on the family system with which they seemed ill-equipped to cope, and initiated an exploration of how families respond to the disclosure of

homosexual orientation of their children. The author looked at how the family attributes meaning to the events, how the disclosure impacts interpersonal relationships within their family and cultural context, and what interventions might be effective in helping support a healthy response. It is with this challenge in mind that the thesis-project will proceed.

In the first chapter, this thesis will begin to develop the concept of the family. A theoretical orientation guides our general understanding of how a healthy family system functions from a psychological perspective. This thesis will also address how things can go wrong and cause dysfunctions in the system. The second chapter will dig a bit deeper to the level of why healthy families function the way they do. Here is where it is necessary to apply a theological lens because only theology can provide many of the answers to "Why?" questions. The author will consider the issues of design and deviation from design as they relate to health and dysfunction. The third chapter will discuss the development of a worldview about homosexuality. This section will reflect on the various Christian perspectives concerning homosexuality and the responses they engender.

The fourth chapter will be a synthesis of the literature that contributed to a better understanding of the issues and helped integrate a psychological model with a theological foundation. This section will introduce research that deals directly with the topic: How do families respond to their homosexual children? The fifth chapter will introduce the case family. The reader will come to understand who they are, how they are functioning as a family and how they arrived at this place. The author will address the implications of their current situation and consider various reasons for their responses. The final chapter will be a description of the therapeutic model in action. The author will explain how the

therapy was conducted and how the family responded to the treatment plan. The author will also discuss possible changes in the therapeutic model in light of the research and the outcomes, and propose areas for future study to better understand families dealing with these specific needs.

CHAPTER 1 – A SYSTEMS ORIENTATION TO THE FAMILY

A family is a basic social group brought together through choice and circumstances, a complex organism made up of unique individuals, consisting of a hierarchal structure, and bound by a common commitment (Balswick & Balswick, 2007). Within this definition are several components that need to be unpacked. We begin with the family as a basic social group. The family unit is the foundation of society (Balswick & Balswich, 2007). Its primary function is to grow, to include members through procreation or affinity, and create socially functioning members. The growing process can be deliberate or unintentional meaning that the family may choose to add members or members may be added through any number of unforeseen circumstances (Walker, Manoogian-O'Dell, McGraw & White, 2000).

As more members are added, the family composition becomes more complex. Individual uniqueness among members can make it more challenging for intents and purposes to be in harmony. The basic functioning of the family may be at risk of dissolution due to conflict; therefore, a hierarchy is created to bring about order (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003). This hierarchy establishes roles for each member within the family designed to guide interaction between members such that each member has a purpose in the function of the family (Minuchin, 1974).

Beyond the basic function of growth, a family is bound together with a common purpose – a commitment to protect the integrity of the family system. Rules are created to direct the actions of each individual toward the goals that will help assure the system functions according to expectations (Minuchin, 1974).

What we are describing here is a structural orientation to the family. Structural Family Theory (SFT) is a holistic, transgenerational, systems oriented, pragmatic, here and now focused model of viewing how the family functions (Jones & Butman, 1991). SFT is concerned with the composition of the family in its environmental context, the interaction of its members, and practical ways to change dysfunctional interactions into more effective relational patterns (Corsini & Wedding, 2008). It is supported by a clearly articulated model of healthy family functioning, and has been developed and used most consistently in therapeutic services for children and families. It is relatively intuitive, with language that most therapists can readily comprehend and embrace. A systems oriented theory can be broadly applied to any relational system from business partnerships to religious institutions (Friedman, 1985).

SFT was developed by Salvador Minuchin as a result of his dissatisfaction with psychoanalytic concepts he experienced when attempting to treat children. As he and his colleagues met with families of troubled children, they began to question the core assumptions of psychoanalysis, that the primary human motivators of behaviors were internally activated drives (Simon, 2008). They noticed two patterns common to these families; they were either tightly interconnected and chaotic (enmeshed) or disconnected and isolated (disengaged). Both lacked a clear hierarchy of authority. Enmeshed parents were too entwined with their children to exercise leadership and control. Disengaged parents were too distant to provide effective guidance and support (Nichols, 2008). Therefore, Minuchin came to conclude individually manifested problems occur within the context of the family (Jones & Butman, 1991).

Minuchin defined five basic aspects of relationship within his theory: structure, subsystems, boundaries, transactional patterns and homeostasis (Nichols, 2008). He understood the structure of the family as centered on a set of functional expectations designed to govern the interactions of its members (Wynn, 1987). This involved sets of rules, implicit and explicit, that permitted the family to fulfill its goals. For Minuchin, these rules organized "the way the family interacts, or the consistent, repetitive, organized, and predictable modes of family behavior that allow us to consider that the family has a structure in a functional sense" (Bevar & Bevar, 2006, p. 174).

Within each family system are several subsystems with unique characteristics, responsibilities and roles. Yarhouse and Sells (2008) say that primary dyad of the family is the adult subsystem which may consist of a husband and wife or be centered on a single adult. This subsystem is responsible for protecting the integrity of the family and they assume various roles to that end. They carry the power to make decisions on behalf of the whole system. The adult subsystem is also responsible for power delegation to other members of the family system according to their interpretation of goals. Their structural expectations include generic survival and development goals; parents are responsible for providing the basic necessities of life and for instructing their children toward self-sufficiency. However, the methods that parents use to accomplish these goals may widely vary and could operate counter to the family's ability to achieve these goals (Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). Other subsystems within the family may include grandparents, children, and a myriad of family and extended family dyads and triads; each of these subsystems function

to advance the family toward its desired goals by following the established structural patterns (Balswick & Balswick, 2007).

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1969) was one of the early systems theorists that perceived the concept of boundaries from a biochemistry perspective in that it deals with the organization and function of cellular components. The relative permeability of cellular boundaries determines the ability of the cell to interact with its environment. Similarly, a family system is a living organism that operates within boundaries. If an individual or family functions within selectively permeable boundaries, they allow for some interaction with others but are protected from being infiltrated by that which may be harmful. This requires that the boundaries be neither too diffuse nor too impenetrable.

Minuchin (1974) saw boundaries as rules that defined inclusion and exclusion of participants within the family and the extent of inclusion. He understood that the selective nature of boundaries meant that they would change as relationships changed. He also understood that this dynamic nature of boundaries would create system stress as the system sought to bring about balance amidst change (Yarhouse & Sells, 2008; Wood, 1995). Minuchin saw the presence of dysfunction in the families of his patients in the enmeshed parents trying to maintain boundaries that were too rigid and the disengaged parents trying to maintain boundaries that were too diffuse (Nichols, 2008).

Given the structure of a family, the subsystems within the family and the boundaries surrounding the family, transactional patterns are the consistent, repeatable behaviors and interactions between the members within the family system. As Minuchin (1974) puts it:

Family structure is the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact. A family is a system that operates through transactional patterns. Repeated transactions establish patterns of how, when, and with whom to relate, and these patterns underpin the system (p. 51).

Homeostasis is the means whereby the family system seeks functional preservation by balancing its needs; it is a change-activated, self-correcting maintenance pattern that will seek alternate processes within the limits of established tolerances to preserve the organizing principles of its existence (Wynn, 1987). This explains how a system can appear functional while an individual member can display symptoms of distress because the system is concerned with family-preservation, not the health of an individual member.

With respect to the identified patient, Minuchin theorized that the real problem was located in the structure of the family system rather than the nature of the symptomatic member (Friedman, 1985). Therefore, when a family member comes to counseling, their presenting problem is symptomatic of homeostatic processes that are in place within the family designed to preserve the integrity of the family functioning. Selvini-Palazzoli (1986) believed behavioral symptoms in families represented family games in which parents and symptomatic children engaged in power struggles (triangulation); the children using their symptoms to try to defeat one parent for the sake of the other. Individual member symptoms were conflict defusers, diverting attention from more basic family conflicts (Jones & Butman, 1991; Corsini & Wedding, 2008). Therefore, a dysfunctional family may project its problems onto a designated member so as to embody the problems of the entire family system; the system survives at the expense of one of its members.

The SFT therapeutic process begins with the therapist joining the family in the position of leader to help model effective leadership. From this vantage point, the therapist observes the dynamic of the family, getting to know their peculiarities, gathering data about their characteristics, analyzing their interactions, identifying strengths and dysfunctions, and diagnosing specific changes needed in the system. Restructuring is the main work of this type of therapy; it involves confrontational interventions that challenge unproductive assumptions and compel change in their system (Wynn, 1987). The goal is to help each individual family member think for themselves independent of the stresses and expectations of the family system while concurrently maintaining relationship, belonging and unity to the system (Balswick & Balswick, 2007).

Minuchin implemented SFT in a rather systematic fashion, utilizing his own unique techniques (Nichols, 2008). However, it would seem that systems theory is better conceptualized as a metastructure, a way of looking at a family. The theory appears to be open to the integration of techniques applied from many other therapy models, like the cognitive-behavioral techniques of questioning and testing cognitions, assumptions, evaluations and beliefs that might be unhelpful and unrealistic, or a narrative approach that helps families to evaluate and reconstruct their family life story.

As a theory, SFT appears to be incomplete by itself and needs to be augmented with other theories to be comprehensive enough for our purposes. The main criticism of SFT is that it appears to concentrate exclusively on the family level, and its conclusions seem reductionistic and collectivistic (Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). It appears to condense all individual symptoms to problems in family functioning, and at the same time sees the

individual as a product of the group. This seems like a form of determinism, suggesting that the system determines the behavior of the individual, deemphasizing the concept of autonomy and personal responsibility. Therefore, we need to supplement this structured approach with a balanced understanding of the individual. This may be why most family therapists integrate several theories, to maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the individual theories (Nichols, 2008).

One important addition to the SFT approach would be to address the biological facets of dysfunction. SFT seems to focus on the systems aspects of mental illness as it relates to family function but may ignore possible biodevelopmental dysfunctions or biochemical imbalances that may contribute to an individual's symptoms. SFT does not appear to provide appropriate therapeutic interventions to treat organic or genetic problems. For this we need to integrate biopsychological theory.

Biological psychology is the study of the relationship between the biological and behavioral functioning of an individual, especially as it relates to the functions of the brain (Rosenzweig, Breedlove & Watson, 2005). Every person is a complex organism made up of hierarchically ordered subsystems (von Bertalanffy, 1969). Each subsystem impacts others in a reciprocal manner. When all subsystems are functioning well, the organism is healthy; however, if one component or subsystem malfunctions, it impacts the entire organism and produces a relative level of dysfunction. For example, the endocrine system produces a variety of hormones that regulate body functions. Endocrine system malfunctions create chemical imbalances that are related to behavioral problems like depression (Barlow & Durand, 2001).

Biological subsystem malfunctions may be due to genetic or environmental factors or both (Barlow & Durand, 2001). Genetic causes include the internal inherited structures with which we are born, the encoded instructions in which drive development of all living creatures. This internal program can produce developmental anomalies directly or leave an individual susceptible to externally triggered abnormalities. As an example, Williams syndrome is a genetically based neurodevelopmental disorder "caused by a microdeletion of about 20 genes on one copy of the long arm of chromosome 7" (Tager-Flusberg & Skwerer, 2007, p. 87).

Environmental factors include external experiences to which we are exposed throughout the life-stages. From conception, our biological systems are assaulted by external forces like stress and toxic chemicals. Depending on the severity, these exposures may cause damage to any number of subsystems. For example, unborn children of diabetic mothers are at risk of brain defect due to the "lack of maternal glycemic control during …pregnancy" (Nelson, 2007, pp. 5-6). The uterine environment of these mothers becomes toxic to their unborn baby inhibiting normal brain development.

Therefore, if a member of a family system suffers from a biologically or environmentally induced physical disorder that manifests in behaviors that work against the normal function of the system, SFT by itself does not seem equipped to address the issues. We need a model that considers the health of the individual within the context of the family system as well as the basic relational aspects of the system. The integration of biopsychological theory will help.

Another helpful addition to the SFT model would be to consider personality development and relationship structures. SFT recognizes the presence of substructures in the family and concentrates on how these subsystems function within the family structure. However, it does not seem to address the typical and atypical qualities of the subsystems or the individuals themselves; it does not tell us what healthy functioning looks like within a family system. This is where the addition of attachment theory may add explanatory power to the structured approach.

Attachment theory focuses on relationship and personality development of individuals as it relates to basic survival. It concentrates on early childhood relationship experiences with a stronger and wiser individual as the primary means whereby a child develops a sense of security and safety allowing the individual to survive, grow and form later attachments. The attachment system is seen as a species-universal, biologically evolved, in-born instinctual process designed to increase the chances of survival in a hostile environment. By keeping close proximity with the caregiver, the child is protected from predation. The outcomes of experiences are internalized as representations of future expectations or working models. Personality is seen as an emergent quality that is supported by established internal working models (Mikulincer & Shavers, 2007).

The attachment drive is not a secondary effect of drives for food or sex; rather it is a primary motivation to seek and maintain relationships. The attachment system is not viewed in terms of developmental stages; instead it is seen as a continually evolving system that functions to relieve stress in any stage of life. While attachment is most evident during the early years of one's life, it functions through the life-cycle. The cyclical

nature of the attachment system is seen as escape-oriented in that one prevents trauma through protection and approach-oriented in that one promotes themselves in seeking relationship (Mikulincer & Shavers, 2007).

Secure attachment is the result of consistent and dependable experience of stress relief resulting from feeling sufficiently protected by the attachment object. Preoccupied attachment is the consequence of inconsistent feelings of security due to unpredictable object behavior during stressful times. Attachment avoidance is the outcome of consistent insufficiency or unavailability of the caregiver and the resulting feelings of insecurity during traumatic experiences (Mikulincer & Shavers, 2007).

Any combination of environmental threats may trigger attachment behaviors. The relative availability of the attachment object may serve to relieve the individual's stress; whereas when the attachment object is unavailable, the individual may experience greater stress. Attachment behaviors evolve through the life-span as the individual establishes new coping strategies to acquire the necessary proximity to the attachment object and therefore relieve stress. Attachment strategies are seen as goal-corrected because the individual constantly compares their internal working model and their experiences with the attachment object to confirm or invalidate their attachment strategies. Young children may cry or reach out to caregivers; older children can run to and cling to the attachment figure; adults could use symbolic proximity, internalized prior experiences of care, in the absence of an actual attachment object. Once the individual has established proximity with the primary attachment figure or brings to mind the internalized model, stress is relieved,

the individual feels secure, the attachment system is terminated and the person is free to explore the environment (Mikulincer & Shavers, 2007).

SFT seems to be a good starting point for our systems orientation to the family. It provides a well established and organized way of looking at the family within its social context. It shows how individual mental health is affected by established family expectations and processes. However, it only looks at the family level and can benefit from the individual level theories of psychobiology and attachment. These bring a sense of balance to SFT as they consider the various complex levels of the body, the mind and the family within the greater context of society. Nonetheless, this is still only a starting point, for we have yet to consider these general revelation aspects of human behavior through the lens of biblical theology. This is where we will begin to answer the question that psychology can never answer – "Why."

CHAPTER 2 – THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE FAMILY

Both psychology and theology in some ways seek to explain human behavior. The difference is in the answers each provides. Psychology is "an evolving science based on observation of human behavior; … as a science [it] describes what is seen, not what is unseen" (Mason, 2008, p. 170). Psychology describes the "who, what, when, where and how" of human behaviors. What psychology seems to lack, however, are answers to the question "why."

Theology is "the unchanging God-revealed truths that inform faith and practice" (Mason, 2008, p. 170). It is based upon God's special revelation; his communication "to particular persons at particular times … which are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings" (Erickson, 1985, p. 153). As such, theology not only describes the "who, what, when, where and how" of human behaviors, but is the origin of ultimate truth; it is the only source that can answer the "why" questions. The Bible is our exclusive fount of sacred writings and provides the foundation of our knowledge of God through which we interpret general revelations found in nature, history, and human beings (Erickson, 1985).

Taken from this perspective, psychology can be seen as a descriptive science that illustrates theological truth, and theology is the truth that explains psychological observations. Put another way, psychology can be seen as a component of God's general revelation; his communication "to all people at all times and in all places" (Erickson, 1985, p. 153). As such "the science of psychology and the art of counseling are both fundamentally religious enterprises" (Johnson & Jones, 2000, p. 263). God created all

people with the ability to understand his general revelation. Even those who reject the concept of divine creation have the ability to comprehend his handiwork. Therefore, all people have the ability to observe and grasp truth (Rom 1:18-20). Erickson (1985) suggests that all people can point to some features of general revelation to recognize truth (p. 173). This is why we can find naturally revealed truth in the ideas presented in many of the modern psychotherapeutic models.

Observing truth and correctly interpreting it, however, is not a foregone conclusion; we must rely on the lens of biblical theology through which we can distinguish truth (Acts 17:22-31). Without the help of the Holy Spirit, the discernment of truth and error is nearly impossible (John 14:26; Rom 9:1; 2 Pet 1:19-21); it may be difficult to know what is God's general revelation and what is an erroneous interpretation. This is why a marriage and family therapist who approaches his or her task through the lens of biblical theology will find that it is imperative to, with the Holy Spirit's assistance, have a carefully constructed and well integrated model from which to draw upon when providing the needed support to individuals and families seeking counsel.

A biblical theology provides a counselor the ultimate metanarrative which provides a moral compass in understanding functional and dysfunctional human behavior. This systems-oriented perspective defines functional behaviors as actions that work according to a specified design and according to God's purposes; likewise, dysfunctional behaviors are actions that work contrary to design and the purposes of God. God's original design and purposes determine what is functional and what is dysfunctional.

A computer programmer designs her system with the purpose of accomplishing specific tasks. If the program operates according to design specifications and produces the desired output, it is a functional system; however, if the program produces erroneous results, it is dysfunctional and needs to be repaired or rewritten. Biblical theology provides us with the original design parameters for human behavior, explains how the program was altered to produce overall system corruption, and how the original programmer has put a fix in place to bring the system back into compliance with the original specifications.

Our theological metanarrative begins in Genesis with the creation of a universal system according to a specified design. From nothing God created everything that existed. As part of creation yet unique from all other creation, he created all people in his immortal image (Gen 1:26ff). Humans were precious to God and he desired a personal relationship with them. No other created thing could boast of bearing the image of God or being called the children of God (1 John 3:1). "When God created man ['ādām], he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female [zākār and nᵉqēbâ] and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man' ['ādām]" (Gen 5:1-2; ref. Gen 1:27). The Hebrew word 'ādām or man is meant to be understood in the generic sense as evidenced by the clarification that the race consisted of male and female (zākār and nᵉqēbâ). The basic idea here is that God designed human beings in his image and that the human race consisted of sexually differentiated beings.

God created humankind to have a special attachment to him. Researchers have observed those who have a "personal relationship with God ... view God as an exalted

attachment figure, partly because God images contain just as many maternal as traditionally paternal attributes" (Granquist, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010, p. 51). They believe that similar attachment behaviors like proximity maintenance and separation anxiety are present and therefore "meet the formal criteria for defining attachment behaviors" (Granquist, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010, p. 51). Miner (2007) believes that the main deficit in their thinking is that they perceive God attachments "as analogues of human attachments" (p. 112), "that our representations of God are nothing but ascribing human qualities to God" (p. 113). Miner proposes that a more theologically consistent perspective would see God as the archetype of attachment "in which there are circular and reciprocal relationships involving the individual, parents, partners, the Christian community and the Trinity" (p. 121).

God also designed humans to be able to communicate with him (Gen 3:9). While they were created in his likeness, God was supreme, providing guidance and instruction to his children; he set up boundaries for humans designed to protect their relationship and the overall universal order. He set humans to work in his creation as his representatives; he gave humankind the role of steward over all the rest of creation (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-20).

Additionally, we see that the man and the woman were uniquely created for each other. God said that "It is not good for man to be alone;" he needed a helper ('ēzer) (Gen 2:18). Bandstra (1988) uses this term to demonstrate that the original design of humans as male and female does not necessarily entail a hierarchical structure. Rather, the fact that both bore the image of God and that they were biologically and socially complementary would seem to indicate equality. The word 'ēzer or helper "denotes

support in the general sense … [and] is not used to designate an inferior … [or] subordinate" (p. 438). It is the same word used of God in his relationship to his people (Deut 33:7; Ps 33:20). So, we learn that these differentiated humans were designed as equals, to be partners in their relationship (Balswick & Balswick, 2008).

God further established a special and unique relationship between man and woman; he brought them together in the covenant of marriage (Gen 2:18-24). Other creatures were created with the capacity to reproduce but humans were designed with the ability to have procreative union, to become "one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Balswick & Balswick, 2008). God's mandate to 'ādām to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen 1:28) suggests that sexuality was a normative expression of the man and the woman in two ways. First, sexual expression was expected in order to honor God's directive to be fruitful. God designed male and females anatomically to fit together to accomplish the role of procreation as partners and he declared his creation "very good" (Gen 1:31). Second, sexual expression was an integral part of being "united" and "becoming one flesh." God designed the unique relationship between husband and wife to be an inseparable union in which "one flesh" was a sign and expression of unity and commitment (Balswick & Balswick, 2008). This union was designed to be a life-long covenant relationship (Matt 19:4-9; Mark 10:6-9) and the core of the family (Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Mathews & Hubbard, 2004).

God's first charge to the man and woman was to produce children (Gen 1:28). This suggests that God formed the first family. It appears that the husband and wife dyad would be the central relationship of the family (Eph 5:21-6:4). Parents would function as

leaders, providing guidance and instruction to their children (Gen 18:19; Prov 13:24; 22:6; Col 3:18-21). The hierarchy of the family would seem to be modeled after the relationship between God and humans, not as a linear, top-down connection, but as interactive relationships with parents and children reciprocally interconnected (Eph 5:25-32; Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Miner, 2010). And so it was that God formed man and woman, he created the union of marriage to bind them together, and he established the pattern of reciprocal relationship that characterized the family. His original design was perfect; everything functioned as it was intended (Balswick & Balswick, 2007). He declared everything "good" (Gen 1:31). Unfortunately, the goodness of creation would not last.

As far as we know, humans were the only created thing that could choose to have a relationship with God. Obversely, they were the only creature that could choose to reject God, and they did so which altered the designed programming. The malfunction caused system-wide failure at the universal level. All of creation became corrupted and mortal (Rom 8:19-23). The impacts of these defects were evident in every level of the system, their relationships, their roles, and their bodies were modified and corrupted (Gen 3:7, 16-24). For our purposes, we will concentrate on the system deviations as they relate to the physical, moral, and social aspects of humans, and the system repair that God put in place to restore system function.

Physical Deviations

From a biological perspective, it appears that humans were changed from having perfect, immortal bodies to corrupt, temporal bodies. This may suggest that human biology was affected in some fundamental way. It seems that God's perfectly ordered

system was altered by the consequences of sin allowing for pain, death, deformations, and disease (Rom 8:18-23; Erickson, 1987).

Pain seems to be the first impact revealed to the man and the woman. Pain is "an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage" (Merskey & Bogduk, 1996, p. 209). In the original design, pain had no function. In the altered reality, "pain is a sensory system that under normal conditions is protective and adaptive. It serves as a warning signal for the body (of tissue inflammation and damage) and induces behavioral changes that facilitate wound healing and recuperation" (Milligan & Watkins, 2009, p. 23). Therefore, pain was a constant reminder that the body could sustain injury due to the corrupt nature of the sin-altered environment. To Eve, God said that she would find pain in the bearing of children (Gen 3:16). To Adam, God said that he would find pain in his effort to make a living (Gen 3:17). From that day forward, humans would experience pain in every day life.

The second physical impact revealed was the consequence stated in the establishment of the original boundary, "for when you eat of [the tree of knowledge] you will surely die" (Gen 2:17). In God's plan, humans were very good and did not physically die. Whether access to the tree of life was part of sustaining physical immortality prior to the Fall (Gen 3:22) we do not know for sure. What we do know is that, after the Fall, humans could live only a limited number of years before their bodies failed due to any number of causes and they would return to the dust from which they were created (Gen 3:19).

Imperfect bodies were the third consequence; their bodies were subject to many kinds of defects. One of the first places the Bible gives mention of a physical problem is when Sarai is introduced as being barren (Gen 11:30). From a biblical perspective, this mention was important because it struck at the basic nature of the procreative union between a husband and wife, and because it indicated a failure to accomplish a charge repeated several times previously – "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:22, 28; 8:18; 9:1, 7).

Finally, disease was another product of physical defect. The first indication in the Bible that there was disease is the reference to physicians who embalmed Jacob (Gen 50:2). The first mention of infection is found in the plague of boils spread on the Egyptians (Exod 9:8-10) and the Levitical law giving instructions for the evaluation of those with leprosy (Lev 13:2). The biblical significance here is that these types of illnesses were considered a visible sign of uncleanness and disqualified those inflicted from being among the worshipping congregation.

As a result of the Fall, humans experienced pain, death, deformations and disease. These were the direct consequences of the original sin's destructive influence and a constant reminder of the fallen condition of humankind. This fallen condition physically impacted every generation of humans since and will influence generations of people until the end of this age.

The Bible tells of some specific cases of individual sins leading to sickness and death; however, it would be a mistake to conclude that all illnesses and death are necessarily due to sin at the personal level. The two most instructive Bible texts that have helped to correct this possible error are Job and the Gospels. Job was considered a

righteous man, yet he suffered pain and disease (Job 2:7-8). When his friends suggested that his sufferings were due to sin he committed, they were summarily corrected by God (Job 42:7-8). In this case we find the cause of Job's suffering was the act of Satan and not Job's sinfulness.

The Gospels reveal yet another perspective; God may allow pain, sickness and death to display his power in the life of that person. In a similar way that God corrected Job's friends, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their inability to see God's work among his people (John 9:1-42). In the cases described throughout the Gospels, Jesus' ability to heal the sick and raise the dead revealed the fulfillment of prophecies concerning him and proved that he was God because he was master over the physical and was able to repair the damage caused by the consequences of sin (Luke 7:18-22).

Moral Deviations

A characteristic of God's image is the will to make choices; this is an image trait given to humans at their creation. By their will, humans chose to distrust God's word; they questioned the lovingly established boundaries of God, specifically, whether or not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would lead to death (Gen 2:16; 3:1-5). It would appear that their minds turned inward as they sought self-satisfaction and self-protection. They seemed to decide to test the limits of their existence to be more like God by increasing their knowledge. They did not appear to trust that God's word was true; they may have thought they knew what was better for themselves. The original sin was found in the self-centered thought (Matt 5:21-32) and it permanently altered their perceptions resulting in a series of immoral behaviors.

Their depraved actions confirmed their sin. They saw something that was attractive and ignoring the prohibition, desired it and took it for themselves (Gen 3:6). They were fully aware of the consequence for this act of defiance, yet their desire seemed to blind them to the facts and led them to disobey. They allowed their faulty perceptions to override God's instruction. They desired created material for pleasure rather than finding contentment in their Creator. This distorted, self-centered, materially focused, pleasure seeking behavior seemed to be a primary motivation of their morally dysfunctional human behavior.

As promised, their eyes were opened but it appears that they received knowledge they could not process. Rather than receive the joy of their enlightenment, they obtained the shame of their indecency; they became aware of their nakedness and in vain attempted to cover themselves (Gen 3:5, 7). That which God had fashioned and was considered perfect and healthy, they apparently saw as disgraceful and contemptible. It is ironic that humans found the naked body to be shameful and at the same time attractive. This seemingly contradictory behavior was due the immoral and corrupt thinking that came as a consequence of sin. Erikson (1987) said that the effects of sin on the sinner is "enslavement" (p. 615) to sinful habits, an "unwillingness to face [the] reality" (p. 616) of sin's consequences, the denial of sin in our lives, self-deceit, insensitivity to God's word, self-centeredness and dissatisfaction.

They no longer trusted God's presence; they feared him (Gen 3:8-10). They hid from their God who created them and showed his care and love for them. In their warped mindedness, they apparently thought that they could hide what they had done from a God

who could see all things. Further, they seemed to think that the God who formed them and knew every inch of their bodies would somehow be offended by their nakedness. The intimate relationship they once had with God was broken and in fear the humans preferred to remain at a distance.

Intimacy between the man and woman was also damaged. When God inquired as to who was responsible, they began to blame each other for their thoughts and actions (Gen 3:12-13). The bond between them was impaired as they each apparently sought to protect themselves from incrimination. Each appeared willing to have the other bear the burden of guilt and the punishment for the offense. However, the omniscient and just God would not allow either to escape the consequences of their decisions; he revealed to them that they would experience physical pain and death, and that they would experience emotional turmoil.

To the woman, God said "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). God was saying that their relationship would be marked with conflict (House, 1998). There was no need for hierarchy of authority prior to the Fall; they enjoyed a one-flesh union working side-by-side as equals (Bandstra, 1988). The new reality would be that each would struggle with the other for power, and ultimately the matter of control would be resolved by force, giving power to the strongest opponent (Erickson, 1987). Their distorted relationship would be characterized as motivated by desire and domination (Balswick & Balswick, 2008; Davidson, 1988; Hollinger, 2008).

To the man, God said that the ground would be "cursed," producing "thorns and thistles" in reaction to his "painful toil" (Gen 3:17-19). God was saying that his labor

would produce frustration and disappointment (House, 1998). Prior to the Fall, the work of their hands produced crops and gave them appropriate satisfaction; they enjoyed their service to God (Walvoord & Zuck, 1985). In the new reality, the natural environment would struggle against them and discourage their efforts to produce crops for their daily consumption. The ground would be difficult to cultivate; it would produce unwanted plants that would compete with their crops. The weather would not cooperate; there would be hail, drought, flood, pestilence, and swarms of insects that would thwart their efforts. Their work would be described as aggravating and difficult. Everything they would consider as achievements would be subjected to the corrupted and consuming forces of their new reality (Matt 6:19; House, 1998).

The perfectly holy God would not tolerate the presence of sinful beings (Isa 59:2; 1 John 1:5). They were banished from the Garden and no longer enjoyed an unrestricted relationship with God (Gen 3:23). Bilateral communication was no longer possible. Direct contact between God and a human was only possible at God's will (Erickson, 1987). People would seek God but not find him (Ps 22:1-2; 69:1-18); he would often seem silent for generations. The primary relationship for which humans were created was broken. However, the attachment to God remained (Miner, 2007) and created an "infinite abyss which can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself" (Pascal, trans. 1966, #425). Corrupt thinking altered humans' yearning to fulfill that desire by seeking that which was created rather than the Creator.

The harmony of the family was destroyed and replaced with grief. The ability to create was met with the ability to destroy. The capacity to love was met with the capacity

to hate. Brother would battle against brother in an effort to achieve control (House, 1998; Erickson, 1987). The account of Cain and Abel effectively illustrates the progression of sin as described by James: "but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (Jas 1:14-15). It appears that rather than rejoicing with Abel's success, Cain became angry at him. God cautioned Cain that "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you" (Gen 4:7). However, he did not heed the warning and allowed his desire for revenge to motivate him to kill his brother. Selfish behaviors made Cain unaware of the solidarity he had with Abel (Erickson, 1987). Therefore, each one suffered due to the injuries perpetrated at the hands of Cain, resulting in Abel's death and Cain's expulsion from the land on which Abel's blood was spilt resulting in his long-term fear of being vulnerable (Gen 4:8-14).

The Bible reveals that the exclusive God image-bearing nature of humans required an exceptional reverence for human life. Apparently, murder was not only an offense toward the victim but also to God because it denigrated his image (Gen 9:6). Therefore, we can see that Cain's sin rose to become "full-grown" in that its destructive power was aimed at retaliating against God by murdering his image-bearer. However, the violations to the family structure did not end there.

Our metanarrative describes how sin warped the created design of sexual expression and destroyed family unity in the account of Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-21). The normative, God-honoring expression of sex, intended to be morally pure, fashioned to be expressed within the bond of marriage, created to unify a man and

woman in love and commitment to each other, was twisted to include depraved acts, perverted to a work of domination and objectification, and distorted to fulfill self-centered desires (Erickson, 1987). The pattern of this story of sin is consistent with the original sin model found in Adam's family. Amnon questioned the established boundaries, and he saw that Tamar was attractive, he desired her for himself, he took her and consumed her, but then becoming aware that he was still dissatisfied, he put distance between himself and her and hated her. In this case, when the sin was full-grown, Amnon lost his own life as Absalom killed him in retaliation.

Social Deviations

Anderson and Guernsey (2009) state that "as an institution, the family is the cradle of any culture" (p. 4). It is therefore no surprise that culture displayed the very same dysfunctions as the first families to populate the earth. The result was one of general moral decline which led to a global judgment in the days of Noah (Gen 6-9), followed by a couple local judgment events of note (Gen 11; Gen 18-19). The common thread within these incidents was the depth of moral depravity which God apparently felt rose to a level where forceful response was necessary. The nature of their immorality included depraved relationships, violence and haughty arrogance.

They began to marry at will, violating the one-flesh union and proper sexual expression (Gen 6:1-2). Some even preferred same-sex sexual unions and rape (Gen 19:5-8). They were attracted to physical beauty, and positions of fame and power (Gen 6:2, 4). It appears that anarchy reigned as people violently positioned themselves to achieve greater influence (Gen 6:11). Additionally, it seems that the humans' distorted minds

conceived all sorts of ways to misuse God's creation for their own selfish purposes (Gen 6:5); they even thought that they could achieve a kind of equality with God by building a tower to heaven (Gen 11).

As a result of continued moral decline and since the social structure was unable to correct itself, God established laws that detailed social boundaries. The Books of the Law specified God's expectations for individual and corporate behaviors (Exod 34; Deut 5; Lev 4; Num 5). Biblical boundaries limited individual, family and social behaviors as a means to protect and bring order back to the system. The laws were designed to instruct God's people to love God completely and love their neighbors (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Luke 10:27). Due to the apparent unrestrained behaviors of humans, the laws specified what was unacceptable to God.

Included in these laws was a prohibition on homosexual behaviors. The Old Testament laws that mention same-sex relations are found in Leviticus 18 and 20. Hollinger (2009) notes that "these texts occur in the context of what is commonly called the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), a set of laws regulating Hebrew purity, ritual cleanliness, and moral holiness" (p. 188). Both of these passages include "a long list of sexual behaviors forbidden as 'abominations' against holiness that brought divine wrath on the offender and danger to the entire community" (Stassen & Gushee, 2002, p. 307). These passages would seem to forbid "same-sex behavior for absolutely everyone *without mentioning any exception or condition*" (Hiembach, 2004, p. 187).

Two Old Testament narratives illustrate God's wrath towards homosexual behaviors. Genesis 19 describes same-sex sexual behaviors found in the cities of Sodom

and Gomorrah, and their resulting destruction. Judges 19 describes "a similar story of desired homosexual relations that ends in a tragic heterosexual rape and death of a woman" (Hollinger, 2009, p. 186). In each case, men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the male visitor(s) be handed over to them "so that we can have sex with them (or him)" and in each case it is clear that God saw these behaviors as unacceptable (Gen 19:5; Judg 19:22).

In the New Testament, Paul discusses homosexuality as evidence that the self-evident truth of God was being suppressed resulting in futile thinking and darkened hearts (Rom 1:18-20). Paul also pointed to homosexual behaviors as "an example of the sort of thing that without repentance keeps a person from entering the kingdom of God" (Hiembach, 2004, p. 187; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10; Rev 22:15).

Balswick and Balswick (2008) point out that we must be careful in how we understand the sin of homosexuality. Referring to the narrative of Genesis 19, they say:

> If we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we observe that in the four later references [Ezek 16:49-50 ; Luke 17:28-29; 2 Pet 2:6-10; Jude 7] about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, homosexuality is not specifically mentioned as the reason for God's judgment... Ezekiel mentions God's rejection of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the book of Jude refers to the sexual immorality and unnatural lusts of Sodom and Gomorrah... The homosexual behavior was condemned by God as one of the many sins and should not be elevated to a significance that God does not emphasize. (p. 117)

God's punitive actions and legal prohibitions did not stop the moral decline of the culture. His response was to work within the family to provide effective change to the culture. It was through one family and ultimately one individual that God chose to restore the system to its functional state. Sin created "a disruption of the very structure of the divine spiritual economy, and this disruption or imbalance must necessarily be set right" (Erickson, 1995, p. 288); God was the only one able to reestablish systemic balance.

Systemic Restoration

The biblical metanarrative reveals a divinely-arranged pattern of choosing a specific family lineage among the world's population to be used by him to restore order to the universal system. God stated very early in this metanarrative that his covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants of was not for their exclusive benefit but for the benefit of the worldwide system (Gen 6:18; 9:8-17; 17:1-18:19; 22:15-18; 26:4; Deut 7:6-9; Rom 16:25-27). God established a mediated relationship between himself and the twelve tribes that descended from Abraham through the priests and a system of sacrifice. The consequence of death and separation from God could only be overcome by the shedding of blood on behalf of the guilty party. This form of substitutionary atonement had a limited and temporary effect (Lev 1:4; Heb 9:6-7). The benefit was limited, one sacrifice profiting one person. It was limited and temporary because the payment covered only previously committed sins; future sins required future sacrifice (Exod 29:36-42). However, its ultimate purpose was to show that no one could find permanent payment through their own efforts (Gal 3).

Through the family of Abraham, a long-term solution was put into place by God, a process to eternally reconcile humans to himself and provide transcending purpose for their lives. This solution was revealed first through the families of Noah and Abraham, then in Issac and Jacob, and fulfilled in the descendant line of David in the person of Jesus Christ who, being the perfect sacrifice, took upon himself the transgressions of the world so that, through him, all people could again approach the throne of God and be called his righteous children (2 Cor 5:18-21; Heb 9:24-28). Through the work of Christ, the kingdom of God had come to earth (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:20-21), yet the process was not yet completed (Luke 22:14-18; 1 Cor 11:23-26); the fullness of the kingdom would come when all creation is restored (Rom 8:19-23; Eph 1:13-14). Until the day Christ returns, humans would struggle to live in a fallen world in which they were charged to minister to others while looking forward to the day of redemption (Phil 1:21-26).

Living in a fallen world, even in the era of the Kingdom of God, means that humans would still need to contend with the sinful nature and selfish ambitions. As such, they struggle with physical and mental dysfunctions. Pain and disease will persist until the day Christ returns (Rev 21:4). The consequences of the corrupted system would impact every day of their lives. This was not because God was either uncaring or unable to alter circumstances; rather, it was due to the natural consequences of human actions done out of freewill. However, God's foreknowledge and sovereignty ensured that regardless of how distorted things appeared to be, he was more than able to restore the system to full and perfect functioning one day.

Additionally, humans would freely continue to challenge the divinely created model

for the family (Deut 4:9; Prov 13:24; Eph 5:21-6:4; 1 Tim 3:4, 12; 5:3-8), marriage and

individual holiness. Rather than being a place of safety and comfort, families would be

internally divided, struggling for power within the family system. Siblings would fight

with each other rather than love each other (Matt 10:21; Luke 12:13); children would defy

their parents rather than honor and obey them (Mark 13:12; Luke 12:52-53); parents

would frustrate their children rather than patiently teach them (Eph 6:4); extended families

would clash rather than support (Luke 12:53). God's design for the family relationships

would be challenged.

The divine intent for a husband and wife to join in a life-long, one-flesh covenant

would be ignored. Hard hearts would motivate individuals to seek divorce from their

spouse rather than reconciliation (Mark 10:2-12). Twisted ideas would see marriage as a

legal burden rather than an unfettered blessing (Rom 7:2-3). Selfish ambitions would

pervert the purpose of sexual expressions rather than value its sanctity (1 Cor 6:16; 7:2-5;

10-16). Desire for control would cause one to subjugate the other rather than show

mutual submission (Eph 5:23-33). God's design for marriage would be challenged.

Personal holiness would be disregarded. Humanity continued to be burdened by

the yoke of slavery to sin, rather than living lives of freedom through the Spirit of Christ

who died to set them free. They failed to consider the solidarity they shared with all

humankind and isolated themselves, rather than loving their neighbor as themselves and

enjoying unity with others. They continued to display acts of the sinful nature like those

who had no inheritance in the kingdom of God, rather than exhibit the fruit of the Spirit

like those who belong to Christ and have crucified the sinful nature (Gal 5). An internal struggle would continue to be waged as the longing to do good was thwarted by the desire to do evil (Rom 7:15-24).

All programming corrections had been put into place but they were not all activated. Many have questioned why the delay; the answer is found in the qualities of mercy and judgment that God displays (2 Pet 3:9). For when all corrections take hold, the time for decision will be gone. God is patiently waiting for the appropriate time to switch on the system fixes. When he does, there will be no place in God's kingdom for those who have not chosen to receive the gift of forgiveness through Christ. God's desire is for all to come to repentance but his tolerance for sin has its limits (2 Pet 3:3-13). When Christ comes in judgment, those who are his will be changed and the dead in Christ will be raised imperishable (1 Cor 15:50-54), the universe will be restored to the perfect created standard (1 Pet 1:4), and all those who have received Christ will be together with God for eternity (1 Thess 4:13-18).

Christian's Response to Sin in Others

It is within this period of waiting that we live out the purpose of life in Christ and where we struggle to accomplish the will of God. The purpose of life is to glorify God; the will of God is to preach the gospel so that all who hear will choose eternal life. Christians are clearly called to live lives of purity and keep themselves from the temptation of sin (Phil 1:9-11; 2:14-15; Gal 5:19-21). The dilemma with which we are faced is this: How do we respond to a sinful world; how do we react when we see sin in others? The

biblical response to sin observed in others appears to fall into two distinct categories: condemnation and compassion.

The Bible makes it clear that sin is not to be ignored, but is to be dealt with in God's time (2 Pet 3:3-10). In both ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, we observe them condemning the actions of the religious leaders of their day (Matt 3:7-10; 12:24-45). Jesus taught that a brother who sins against another brother is to be promptly shown his fault; however, if he does not listen then he is to be treated as an outsider (Matt 18:15-17). An account of the early church describes a husband and wife who together conspired to lie to the leaders about their contribution to the church ministry. The result was that both were struck dead by God (Acts 5:1-11). Paul warned the Roman churches that there would be people among them that would seek to divide the church through unorthodox teaching; he instructed the church to stay away from them (Rom 16:17). Additionally, Paul learned of an account where a man was involved in an openly tolerated incestuous relationship; he told this church to expel the man (1 Cor 5).

The Bible also makes it plain that sinful people are to be loved. Jesus taught that the most important commandments were to love God and love one's neighbor; he said this was the fulfillment of the law (Matt 22:35-40; Mark 12:29-33; Luke 10:25-37). Jesus told his listeners that they were to love and pray for their enemies; he further commanded them to forgive others for their sins (Matt 5:43-48; 6:14-15). He demonstrated that though a brother was to confront another who had sinned against him, the desired result was to win him over (Matt 18:15-17). When challenged by the religious leaders on his verdict of an

adulterous woman, Jesus showed mercy and commanded her to leave her life of sin (John 8:3-11).

Within Paul's condemnation of the incestuous relationship, he displayed mercy; he desired that the man's sinful nature be destroyed so that his soul would be saved (1 Cor 5:5). Along with other apostles, he taught that restoration was the desired result of confronting the sin of a brother (Gal 6:1; 2 Thess 3:14-15), and that it was the responsibility of a brother to try to rescue those who are caught in the web of sin (Jas 1:27; 1 John 5:16-17; Jude 22-23). Therefore, while sin was to be condemned and disciplined, this is always to be done with love and mercy (John 4:1-42).

Within this short review of the biblical literature, another aspect to the response to sin is revealed. The strongest responses were always reserved for those who considered themselves as religious and were confronted with their sins, but ignored the warning (Matt 3:7-10; John 5:16-45). To those individuals we observe a pattern of admonitions to reconsider their religious presumptions (Matt 12:9-12; Mark 3:1-6). The prophets of Israel dealt with this religious arrogance by exposing their sin and calling them to fulfill God's intended purpose. Amos, Hosea and Micah called for social reformation due to abuses perpetrated on the poor. Each had a word of correction claiming that God requires his people "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8) rather than meaningless religious acts (Hos 6:6; Am 4:4-5; Mic 6:6-7). Likewise, James rebuked the church when he exposed the sin of religious arrogance (Jas 1:27) and prejudice (Jas 2:1-4); he confirmed that the Lord desires justice, mercy and humility over all other actions.

Conclusion

Psychology can be viewed as a part of God's general revelation. It is useful in describing behaviors that are observed within individuals, families and culture. However, it requires the larger context of biblical theology to gain meaning for only biblical theology provides the ideal blueprint parameters and the reason for deviation from the original design. This perspective is found exclusively in God's special revelation to humankind as presented in the Holy Scriptures.

The metanarrative found in the Bible reveals that God created all things in a perfectly ordered system. Within that system he created humans to uniquely bear his image, and proscribed relationships and behaviors that were consistent with his flawless design. God established a special relationship between himself and humans, an exclusive relationship between man and woman, and secure relationship within the family. However, the system and the relationships were corrupted and altered when humans determined to satiate their own personal desires ahead of and in opposition to divinely established boundaries. The universal system malfunctioned.

The results of the malfunction were physical, moral and social deviations from the intended design. The system could be restored only by the work of reconciliation and humans could not accomplish that work; only God could initiate reconciliation and restoration. He did so through a select family leading to the person of Jesus Christ, who was the perfect sacrifice required to atone for human sin, reconcile humans to God and restore divine order. However, God's patience has stayed the restoration to allow as

many as possible to be saved. Therefore, humans continue to suffer the effects of the corrupted system as they await the day of redemption.

Our Christian faith informs us that we are all sinners in need of a Savior; not a single one of us can make it without Christ (Rom 3:23). Since we all struggle with sin, our response to others must reflect our solidarity. This author found that while homosexual behavior is a sin, it is not an unforgivable sin, nor is it a threat to the message of the Gospel. The message of the Gospel is the good news that Christ has paid the price for each of us and it is by faith we are saved, not by works so that no one can boast (Eph 2:8-10). The Gospel cannot be threatened. What can be threatened is the effectiveness of sharing the message. If one shows hatred and fear towards others, they are not showing the kind of vulnerable love expressed by the Gospel (1 John 4:18). Only an unconditional love can convey the intent of the Gospel message.

Christians are called to be clarions of the Gospel message, declaring the coming kingdom and salvation for all who will listen. They are also called to be a light in the darkness to show the world their inability to save themselves. They are to demonstrate God's message of love through the way they live their lives and through the acts of love they show to others. Our hope is that Christians can be defined by who they are in Christ rather than by what they stand against. It is from this perspective that we examine the outworking of theology in the lives of a family. The next chapter will demonstrate how individuals develop a worldview that operates within the paradox of "already but not yet" as they deal with life's complexities.

CHAPTER 3 – DEVELOPING A WORLDVIEW ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Any discussion on the topic of homosexuality must begin with some basic definitions. The term homosexual is viewed differently by various groups. For some, it is a general term for any person who displays a persistent and predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex (Hyde & Delamater, 2008). However, others prefer to distinguish between males and females, using the term homosexual and gay interchangeably for males and the term lesbian for females (LaSala, 2000). Further, many will qualify this term to differentiate between those who are sexually attracted or oriented toward same-sex individuals, those who practice same-sex behaviors, and those who identify themselves with a particular lifestyle (Balswick & Balswick, 2008; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). In addition, there are those who consider themselves to be bisexual; they are attracted to and engage in sex with both same-sex and opposite-sex partners (Hyde & Delamater, 2008). To prevent confusion, we will qualify our terms in our discussion to clearly distinguish the person and the practice of homosexuality by using the term gay and lesbian to refer to the male and female persons, and attraction, behavior and lifestyle to refer to the level of homosexual participation.

A person who engages in homosexual behaviors may not be persistently and predominately sexually attracted to same-sex persons nor consider themselves to be living a homosexual lifestyle (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Clark & Rakestraw, 1994). There are many cases of situational homosexuals, meaning that their same-sex behaviors are only evident under certain circumstances (Kirkpatrick, 2002). For example, the lesbian community refers to girls who engage in same-sex behaviors during their time in

college as lesbians until graduation or "LUGs" (Sohn, 2003). Their behaviors were only evident while they are in college. Incarcerated men and women are another example; these individuals may perform same-sex acts when confined together without the availability of opposite sex partners (Potter, 2004). In each of these groups, their behaviors are homosexual in nature but their attractions are still toward those of the opposite sex (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000). These examples demonstrate how important it is to clearly distinguish between behavior and attraction.

These examples also show how difficult it is to determine the prevalence of homosexuality among the general population. According to the latest research statistics, the percentage of individuals reporting their sexual identity as homosexual ranged from 2% to 4% of males and 1% to 3% of females (Chadra, Mosher, Copen & Sionean, 2011). Bisexuality was reported as 1% to 3% of males and 2% to 5% of females (Chadra, Mosher, Copen & Sionean, 2011). Those reporting to have had same-sex contact sometime in their lives were reported as 4% to 6% of men and 11% to 12% of women (Chadra, Mosher, Copen & Sionean, 2011). These statistics, and all prior research, has been questioned by both proponents and opponents of homosexuality. Proponents claim the numbers are minimums due to classification confusions and social prejudice related underreporting (Friedman & Downey, 1994), and culturally related bias among western researchers (McGoldrick, Loonan, Wohlsifer, 2007). Opponents claim the numbers are relatively small (Balswick & Balswick, 2008) and inflated due to inconsistent research methodology and bias (Burtoft, 1994).

Views on the Etiology of Homosexuality

Relevant to our discussion is the perspective one takes on the etiology of homosexual. There appears to be two perspective continua to consider when examining our view on this matter. The first is the nature and nurture continuum (Figure 1) that reveals one's view about how sexual orientation is acquired. The second is the choice and predetermined continuum (Figure 2) that shows the perceptions around the prospect of change. Overarching both these scales is a third perspective that sees homosexuality as either a normal or abnormal human condition. All three of these perspectives interact upon each other to shape one's viewpoint.

Figure 1: Nature or Nurture

| | Biological & | |
| Biological | Experiential | Experiential |
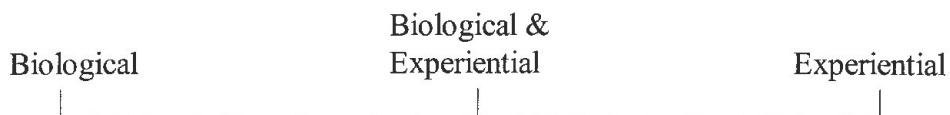
Figure 2: Change Possibilities

| | Vulnerabilities unchangeable | |
| Unchangeable | Behaviors changeable | Changeable |
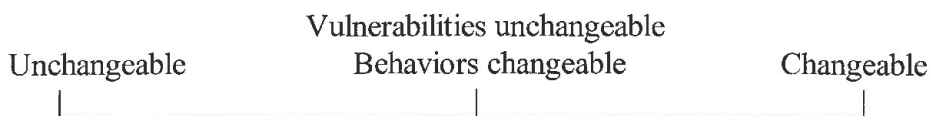
On one end of the "Nature or Nurture" scale (Figure 1) we view homosexuality as being a product of genetic coding and biological development. Hyde and Delamater (2008) provide a comprehensive survey of the biological theory of homosexuality. They describe four biological factors: genetic, prenatal, brain structure and endocrine function. A review of the current research suggests that there are three genes found on

chromosomes 7, 8 and 10 that may influence homosexual behaviors. Other research implies variations in the uterine environment due to atypical hormones, maternal antibodies, or other environmental factors may cause developmental deviations during critical periods of fetal growth. A number of studies have examined different regions of the brain in an effort to correlate homosexual behaviors with variations in brain structure. Additionally, some have proposed that certain levels of testosterone or estrogen may factor into the equation. Hyde and Delamater's (2008) conclusion is that while these biological factors have "new supporting evidence ... much more research is needed" (p. 353).

At the other end of the scale we view homosexuality as a product of experiences. In his book, *Moral Choices*, Scott Rae (2009) suggests that there are certain developmental factors that homosexually oriented people share: (1) an angry or absent father and closed-bonded or domineering mother, (2) lack of pleasure or participation in the processes of puberty, (3) introduction to sexuality with same-sex partner was enjoyable or with opposite-sex was not enjoyable (Rae, 2009). While he does not indicate his source for this perspective, it is similar to that of a study published in 1976 by Irving Bieber who found more homosexual than heterosexual individuals had dominant, enmeshed, and overly protective mothers and weak or passive fathers (Balswick & Balswick, 2008). The factors that Rae listed were also cited in a study by Richard Green (1987); of those studied, 40% showed homosexual orientation and 32% showed bisexual inclinations (as cited in Barlow & Durand, 2001)

The National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuals (NARTH) places a greater emphasis on developmental factors. This would be consistent with their behavioral orientation toward therapy. They consign current genetic research results to minor roles compared to early childhood through adult experiences. Citing the recent twin studies conducted by Sanders (2007) at the Evanston Northwestern Healthcare Research Institute, they concluded that his failure to show genetic factors could predict homosexuality 100% of the time proves that genes can be only an indirect influence of homosexual behavior (NARTH, 2007).

Echoing many of the studies reviewed above, Barlow and Durand (2001) take a position squarely on the center of the continuum, suggesting that homosexuality results from a myriad of factors both biological and experiential. They describe Daryl Bem's (1996) sexual orientation progression model that begins with genetic vulnerabilities and moves through stages of early experiences that leave the individual feeling different from same-sex peers. The result is what Bem calls "exotic becomes erotic" (as cited in Barlow & Durand, 2001, p. 313) which refers to the attraction one has to that which is different from self. Therefore, because same-sex peers are different, they are attractive. Barlow and Durand (2001) conclude by saying that any single-dimension explanation of causation will likely be proven wrong; "Biology sets certain limits within which social and psychological factors affect development" (p. 313).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2008) takes the integrated approach as well. In their publication on sexual orientation and homosexuality they concede that "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual

develops a [particular sexual] … orientation" (para. 7). They suggest that despite the effort of many researchers, sexual orientation cannot be determined by any specific factor or factors. They conclude that in determining sexual orientation, "many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles" (para. 7).

Related to the question of how sexual orientation is acquired is the question about the possibility of change. On one end of the Change Possibilities scale (Figure 2) is the view that sexual orientation is predetermined and change is not possible or desirable. This view is taken by many secular (Barlow & Durand, 2001) as well as some Christian writers.

Balswick and Balswick (2008) provide a historical perspective of the western cultural view. A distinction between orientation and behavior was made in the 1800s and in the 1900s a medical model was applied with the view that homosexuality was a sickness. The first publications of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses (DSM) included homosexuality as a mental illness until the 1980s (Balswick & Balswick, 2008). Currently, the psychiatric profession considers homosexuality as a valid sexual orientation and considers efforts to change one's orientation as an ethical violation (APA, 2000).

On the other end of this second scale is the view that sexual orientation is a choice and change is possible. Those that take this position tend to be very traditional Christians. In his book, *The Agenda: The Homosexual Plan to Change America*, Rev. Louis Sheldon (2005) claims the inconsistencies of research surrounding the etiology of homosexuality are proof that homosexuality is not an in-born condition but a lifestyle. Further, he believes that the underlying homosexual agenda is to recruit children to join this lifestyle.

His beliefs are shared by organizations like The Traditional Values Coalition and conservative politicians like J.C. Watts. They call for Christians to actively oppose homosexuals (Sheldon, 2005).

The midpoint of this scale represents the view that sexual orientation occurs within predetermined vulnerabilities but the individual can choose to suppress or behave in opposition to those inclinations. This would mean change is possible but with great effort. Penner and Penner (1981) believe that homosexual orientation is not likely to change; however the individual needs to focus completely on his or her spouse and learn to enjoy him or her. The Christian organization, Exodus International, views the sexual orientation of a person to be determined by birth and experiences; however they state that "men and women DO choose how they will act on the same-sex attractions they are experiencing" (Buchanan, 2010, para. 4).

It would appear that many of those who view homosexuality as determined by biology tend to also view the prospect of change as impossible or irrelevant. Likewise, many of those who see homosexuality as a product of experience or learning will tend to see change as possible through the modification of behaviors. Those who take a position of nature and nurture would likely vary in their view of the prospect of change. This is where the third perspective would come into play. Is homosexuality a normal or abnormal condition?

If homosexuality is a normal condition then change is not a desired end. Moreover, it would be morally wrong to subject someone to therapy that attempts to change them. This is the position taken by the APA (2000) and a majority of the mental

health professionals. However, if homosexuality is an abnormal condition then change is the desired end. Furthermore, it would be neglectful to deny a person the appropriate treatment. This is the position taken by organizations such as Exodus International (2012) and NARTH (2012).

In light of the views about the etiology of homosexuality, we can see how they begin to shape the response one may have towards those who have same-sex orientations, behaviors or lifestyles. For example, Angela Buchanan (2010) admitted, "I had a hard time feeling compassion for someone who chose to engage in behavior that I couldn't comprehend and frankly didn't want to understand;" her belief shaped her response, which she now thinks lacked grace. It is the position of this author that the etiology of homosexual orientation is likely found in the confluence of biological and experiential factors, and an individual's view of homosexual orientation seems to be the product of the convergence of moral and emotional factors.

Views on the Morality of Homosexuality

Vital to our considering the morality of homosexuality is our understanding that morals constitute the concept of right and wrong outside of cultural codes. Hollinger (2008) was concerned about the confusion of this distinction when he said, "One of the grave dangers today is reducing Christian ethics down to pastoral care (so that care and compassion become the ethic), or reducing pastoral care to ethics (so that our ethics becomes the care)" (p. 174).

As we discussed in Chapter 2, we have two sources of knowledge: general revelation and special revelation. While morals can be known through general revelation

due to natural law or conscience (Rom 1:18-20), our clearest revelation of right and wrong is contained in Scriptures. However, there is much disagreement around the teaching on homosexuality found in the Scriptures. James Nelson (1994) suggests that there is a four-fold topology of possible theological-ethical approaches to homosexuality: rejecting-punitive, rejecting-nonpunitive, qualified-acceptance, and full-acceptance. These four views are formed by the way one approaches the major scriptural texts on the issue of homosexuality. Most contemporary Christian ethicists argue for either the second or fourth approach (Clark & Rakestraw, 1994).

Nelson (1994) represents the full-acceptance view. He sees the Scriptures as primarily addressing the acts of homosexuality, not homosexual orientation. He views the prohibitions in Old Testament Law and in the writings of Paul as dealing with the cultic activities of idolatry, violating the first and second commandments. He argues that, as God-incarnate, Jesus was the primary interpreter of our faith and his silence on the matter of homosexuality speaks loudly that he did not feel it was important enough to address. Nelson sees the Scriptures as consistently addressing the proper locus of worship and the general teaching on sexual issues as concerned with acts of committed love; therefore, our God-honoring sexuality is to embody "commitment and trust, tenderness, respect for the other, and the desire for ongoing and responsible communication with the other" (p. 190). Nelson does not believe the same-sex expressions of love violate God's call for "responsible genital expression" (p. 191).

Charles Curran (1971), Helmut Theilicke (1964) and Lewis Smedes (1994) represent the qualified-acceptance view. They concede that the Scriptures teach the high

ideals for living a Christian life; however, they point out the futility of living a perfect life in an imperfect world. They take a "lesser of two evils" (Hollinger, 2008, p. 177) approach similar to Jesus' comments on divorce; it is an accommodation due to imperfect circumstances and better than chaos. Their view is that homosexuality is not sinful, only imperfect (Hollinger, 2008).

David F. Wright (1994) and Stanton Jones (1994) represent the rejecting-nonpunitive approach. They see the Bible as consistent in its teaching on the universality of sexual purity as based on God's original Genesis design. They view sex as a good gift from God that can be misused and cause injury to others. They point out that everywhere homosexuality is addressed, it is condemned as unnatural and immoral; therefore, the only way one can scripturally support homosexual activity is through misinterpretation or lowering the view of scriptural authority. Additionally, they argue that the argument from silence fails because it is clear that the ancient culture understood the problem of homosexuality. Jesus plainly articulated God's design standard; he didn't come to set aside the law but to fulfill the whole law (Matt 5:17-18), and his mercy and compassion was shown while adhering to rigorous moral standards (John 8:11; Gagnon, 2001).

Finally, Greg Bahnsen (1978) reflects the rejecting-punitive approach. He believes the only source of Christian ethics is found in Scripture; no other sources need be considered. In his view, haggling over orientation and behavior is pointless because if "it were crucial to our moral judgments that we distinguish between innocent inversion and culpable homosexual acts, then certainly God would be aware of that distinction and bring

it to light in his inspired Word" (p. 66). Therefore, there are no innocent homosexuals; they are all under God's condemnation for their thoughts and actions (Hollinger, 2008).

Views on Responding to Homosexuality

People will typically respond to homosexuality in a way that is consistent with their worldview. Those who take a full-acceptance approach will respond with love and compassion. Those who take a rejecting-punitive approach will typically respond with judgment and avoidance. However, this is not always the case, especially for those who differentiate between the sin and the sinner. Even someone who espouses a rejecting-punitive approach can hate the sin and love the sinner (Bassett, et al. 2001; Bassett, et al., 2000).

Zahniser and Boyd (2008) demonstrate this by avoiding the debate over interpretations of biblical passages dealing with homosexuality; rather, they concentrate on their response based on the priority of love. "Regardless of the correct moral judgment concerning homosexual behavior, Christians are called to lives of self-giving love on behalf of gay and lesbian persons" (p. 215). They are not saying the moral debate is unimportant; they are saying that regardless of the moral directive we are called to respond to others in love. They point to the fact that Christians are called to be continuing Christ's work of reconciliation by revealing that all have sinned but Christ's atoning sacrifice means that he no longer counts our sins against us when we place our confidence in him alone (Zahniser & Boyd, 2008).

In his book, Philip Yancey (1997) describes how his response to homosexuality changed while keeping faithful to his biblical view. He was able to forfeit his belief that

homosexuality was a "casual lifestyle choice" (p. 163) without deconstructing or

devaluing the Scriptures. He learned to be more compassionate to those whose struggles

with sin were different but for whom the consequences of sin were the same. He first

recognized his need for a Savior and then his need to display the love of Christ to others

regardless of their sinful behaviors.

However, many writers believe theologically conservative churches lack the

balance of grace and truth when it comes to responding to issues of homosexual behavior.

They believe theologically conservative viewpoints correlate with negative attitudes

toward homosexuality or "homonegativity" (Bassett, et al., 2000; Hudson & Ricketts,

1980). This perspective is confirmed by the preponderance of studies correlating

homonegativity with theologically conservative ideologies (Finlay & Walther, 2003;

Herek, 1987, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004). One study suggested a possible correlation

between homonegative attitudes and the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE). This study linked

the PWE with religious beliefs, and religious beliefs with the idea of homosexuality as a

choice. The implication of this study was that individuals with high religious beliefs who

also tend to believe homosexuality is a choice are more likely to have negative attitudes

toward people with homosexual orientations (Malcomnson, 2006).

Yet another study proposed that prejudicial behaviors differ between those whose

religious beliefs were predominately extrinsic (socially oriented) and those whose religious

beliefs are intrinsic (worldview oriented). Herek (1987) found that those who had a high

extrinsic religious belief showed high prejudice toward all individuals outside of their

social structure and were therefore more racist, and those who had a high intrinsic

religious belief showed high intolerance for those whose lifestyle was in conflict with their religious principles and were therefore more antihomosexual.

Uncomfortable with the antireligious overtones of this research, Rosik (2007) proposed Herek's (1987) study ignored the idea that those with high intrinsic religious beliefs were intolerant of homosexual behaviors not of the persons. Indeed, a footnote in Herek's research paper stated "such a separation, however, may be primarily a rationalization for prejudice. This point becomes more apparent when such a person-behavior distinction is extended to other minority groups" (Herek, 1987, p. 44). Therefore, Rosik proposed that the Herek study did not suggest antihomosexual behavior among those with high intrinsic religious beliefs but rather an intolerance of homosexual behaviors among that group.

Bassett, et al. (2005) concur and suggest that theologically conservative college students tended to limit their homonegativity to moral rather than relational terms; they did not seem to limit their interactions with gays and lesbians to any greater degree than with other "sinners" (p. 17; Bassett, et al., 2001; Bassett, et al., 2000; Fulton, Gorsuch & Maynard, 1999). Additional studies indicated that the interventions of education and exposure to people with homosexual orientations moderated students' opinions; those who held an oppositional stance before interventions showed less opposition after, those who held a strongly supportive stance before interventions showed a more moderated support after (Bassett, 2005).

Additionally, Yarhouse et al. (2005) suggested that Christian adults age 18-22 who were questioning their sexual identity depended on a number of resources as they worked

through the complex issues of identity and self-awareness in view of faith and experience. The results of the study revealed that young adults highly valued their faith and, after peers, viewed their youth pastor as a safe person to which they could disclose their sexual identity confusion. These young people did not seem to fear that their youth pastor would reject them because they struggled with their sexual identity. Yarhouse et al. (2005) suggested that youth pastors have been overlooked in the existing literature as "important proximal agents" (p. 352) for young adults seeking counsel.

The good news, it would appear, is that the Church seems to be moving in the direction of grace/truth balance. However studies have shown that even if evangelicals believe they are clearly differentiating between the behavior and the person, the American culture at-large does not comprehend that distinction. Barna Group (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007) surveys of non-churched young adults showed that 91% say that "antihomosexual" accurately described present-day Christians (p. 28). Further, 80% of evangelicals surveyed said they supported laws preventing homosexual relations between consenting adults (p. 94), and only 2 out of more than 1000 randomly sampled evangelicals offered solutions of "love" and "compassion" to the problem of homosexuality (p. 101). Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) concluded that the general population saw no evidence of love shown to people with homosexual tendencies and young people were rejecting their faith as being hypocritical and hateful. The average young adult sees homosexual people as a minority group in much the same way as minority races. Denying legal rights to minorities is seen as bigotry and is not perceived as a loving Christian act.

According to the latest studies (Barna, 2011), among the top six reasons young people leave the church is that they believe the Christian experience is shallow, churches are antagonistic to science, and churches are judgmental. They believe that because many teens and young adults are delaying the traditional path of college, career and marriage, these young people are also delaying the resolution of faith questions; therefore, they remain more skeptical about the relevance of faith longer than their traditional counterparts.

Conclusion

To a great degree, the etiology of homosexuality is unknown. Science will continue to observe and seek corollary evidence for the etiology of homosexuality. However, Christians create for themselves a lose-lose situation when they ignore the prevailing scientific research suggesting that homosexuality is the result of complex biological and experiential factors. Not only are they risking the positive view of Christianity's personal and cultural relevance over issues that do not threaten the Gospel message but they are expending energy opposing the reasonable search for truth. In fact, Christianity loses nothing if genes are found to be a factor in determining homosexual orientation. Just as the discoveries of the genetic link in Huntington's Disease has furthered medical science in the ability to diagnose and treat people with the genetic markers, so a discovery of the link between genetic vulnerabilities could help our understanding and treatment of those with homosexual orientation. Further, spending time crusading against homosexuality is contrary to the message of the Gospel (Miles, 2006).

The moral aspects of homosexuality have been reviewed, and we are encouraged to search the Scriptures and depend on the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom while we endeavor to correctly interpret the text. We are not to let our emotions cloud our judgment and confuse what is moral with how we display love to others. Further, we are instructed to "encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess 4:18), and "stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess 2:15).

We are challenged to respond to everyone with love (Matt 22:39; 25:34-40), recognizing that we too are sinners in need of a Savior (Matt 7:1-5). This challenge is all the more important given that the current literature seems to indicate even the most diligent evangelical church would struggle to know how to show the love of Christ to a person who is engaged in a homosexual lifestyle. The common responses of evangelicals to the problem of homosexuality would seem to indicate they have heard more negative messages than positive ones about the issue of homosexuality (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007). The average member is more likely to have heard the message that homosexual behavior is a sin but unlikely to have heard a message that suggests ways to lovingly respond to those individuals who have homosexual tendencies. Without a positive response, listeners are left with only the negative feeling about the sin; they have no methods to respond in positive ways.

The literature seems clear that our churches are viewed by the average American as being unloving and biased against people who have homosexual tendencies. Their opinions are formed from the messages they hear and the actions they see. One message

they hear is that homosexuality is a sin and the presumption is then made that homosexuals cannot be Christians because sinners cannot be Christians. Another message is that Christians are against homosexually oriented individuals politically in that they publically speak out against laws designed to favor the rights of homosexual persons.

The literature is also clear that unless evangelicals begin to find more loving ways to speak and act toward people who are homosexual, young adults will continue to perceive Christianity as out-of-touch with reality and lacking in substance. Further, the American culture will continue to see Christianity as irrelevant, or worse, anti-cultural. Christians will be marginalized and even treated as adversaries.

Finally, the literature indicates that churches may lose their young adults over this issue (Barna, 2011). Young evangelicals seem very much able to demonstrate their differentiation of the moral aspects of homosexuality and their relationship with those who live a homosexual lifestyle. They are more than willing to prevent their moral values from influencing their relationships. Additionally, those young adults who have strong feelings against homosexual people respond positively to education and exposure to homosexual people; when faced with the information about homosexuality and allowed to meet people who have homosexual inclinations they respond by showing respect and love (Bassett, et al., 2005).

CHAPTER 4 – LITERATURE REVIEW: FAMILIES WITH HOMOSEXUAL CHILDREN

As previously stated, the literature dealing with the issues surrounding homosexuality was primarily focused on the experience of the gay or lesbian person. Of the literature that looked at the experiences of families, most were anecdotal volumes and only a few were research studies dedicated to parents' perspectives. Within these studies, most researchers discussed one of the limitations to their studies concerned sample selection. While lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adolescents were seen as an invisible group to society and social researchers (Ryan, 2010); their families would appear to be even more so. Therefore, participants were typically recruited where they could be found through clinical organizations and support groups for parents of homosexual people (Anhalt & Morris, 1998; D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005; Gramling, Carr & McCain, 2000; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Holtzen, Kenny & Mahalik, 1995; Laird, 2003; LaSala, 2000; Lease & Shulman, 2003; Oswald, 2002; Patterson, 2000; Salzberg, 2004). Because the participants were already receiving support, they had progressed in their adjustment experience past the point of disclosure. Missing from the sample were those for whom disclosure had yet to occur, were not at the point of seeking support, found support was unavailable, felt support was unwelcome, or refused to take part in the research for any number of reasons.

Others commented that the greatest challenge to pure research was the cultural biases that were present within the researchers themselves. Laird (2003) observed "researchers, depending on their personal politics, have often assumed an attacking or

defensive bias that has not served the best or most creative aims of social science research" (p. 203). The topic of homosexuality is ripe with emotion and evokes a passionate response; however, scientific inquiry requires as objective a stance as one is able to muster in order to avoid contaminating the research findings.

Within the literature, there appeared to be very few research studies specifically centered on families with lesbian children. This is significant because nearly every study that considered gender issues as they related to homosexuality found that gender differences played a significant role not only in the way same-sex relationships were approached but how family relationships were approached (Degges-White & Myers, 2005; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2002; Laird, 2003; Margolin & Patterson, 1975; Scrivner & Eldridge, 1995). Further, no empirical research was found that studied traditional Christian families with lesbian daughters. This is also significant in that faith issues were found to impact a family's response and their ability to cope with disclosure related stress (Lease & Shulman, 2003; Oswald, 2002; Walsh & Pryce, 2003; Worthen & Davies, 1996). Therefore, a thorough investigation must involve searching through general studies of adolescents and young adults disclosing same-sex attraction (SSA) to families, studies of families with LGB children, and studies of the impact of religion on SSA disclosure in order to discover general common themes surrounding the responses of parents and families with LGB children, and any specific issues in families with lesbian children.

General Themes of Parental Responses Toward LGB Children

Most researchers seem to agree that family disclosure is important to the mental health of the LGB individual (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005; Cass, 1997; Davis & Friel, 2001; Gramling, Carr & McCain, 2000; Holtzen, Kenny & Mahalik, 1995; LaSala, 2000; Patterson, 2000; Oswald, 2002). However, disclosure to parents was the most stressful experience for LGB individuals (LaSala, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1998) and among the most stressful experiences for their families (Holtzen, Kenny & Mahalik, 1995; Saltzberg, 2004). Several researchers suggested that parents experience the disclosure process in stages (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005; DeVine, 1983; LaSala, 2000; Phillips, 2007; Salzberg, 2004; Strommen, 1989a, 1989b). Others warn that any overly linear process loses perspective of the diversity that may be experienced by the participants (Degges-White & Myers, 2005). However, a general approach to stages might be helpful if approached from a timing model.

This author has synthesized the various stages into a three phase disclosure timing model. A disclosure timing model looks at where the family is in terms of their awareness of their child's SSA (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005; DeVine, 1983; Salzberg, 2004; Strommen, 1989a, 1989b). The first phase is predisclosure which is marked by anticipatory fear by the child and possible unconfirmed suspicions by the parents. The second phase is disclosure which is characterized by the initial SSA disclosure and parental reactions to the disclosure. The final phase is stabilization which is distinguished by the processes of equilibration and settling into a new reality. The studies seem to indicate that the most important phase in predicting the nature of parental reaction is the predisclosure

phase. They suggest that relational strength, structural flexibility (Herdt & Koff, 2000; Holtzen, Kenny & Mahalik, 1995; LaSala, 2000; Oswald, 2002; Patterson, 2000; Tharinger & Wells, 2000), and religious commitment (Lease & Shulman, 2003; Ryan, 2010) are key factors in determining the strength of family resilience when faced with their child's SSA.

Predisclosure Relational Strength. The stronger the parent/child relationship, the more likely it is that they will communicate internal struggles. Positive communication about sex seems to have a protective effect on adolescent sexual activity (Davis & Friel, 2001) and may prevent parents from having unsubstantiated suspicion-based fears that motivate negative behaviors such as verbal abuse (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005). They may not feel the necessity to use aggressive means to correct possible unacceptable behaviors.

Researchers found that LGB individuals were more likely to disclose their SSA to mothers before fathers because they felt mothers were more accepting and compassionate (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2000; Patterson, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1998; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). However, most studies found there to be no difference between mothers and fathers in their negativity toward their sons or daughters (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2000; Holtzen, Kenny & Mahalik, 1995), and at least one study showed that fathers displayed twice the number of positive responses to their children compared to mothers' responses (Margolin & Patterson, 1975). Still, the most common response was negative and studies seem to show that the negativity is relative to the

quality of the parent/child relationship prior to disclosure (Patterson, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004).

Laird (2003) suggests that parent/child relationship bonds tend not to be strong enough to endure the SSA disclosure and that avoiding the "coming-out" dilemma is often preferable to dealing with the stresses related to SSA disclosure. She believes it is more important for the LGB individual to strengthen their partner relationship that provides support and acceptance than to be concerned with family of origin connections that tends to hold heterosexist and homophobic attitudes.

Predisclosure Structural Flexibility. The more flexible the family structure, the more likely the family will be able to adjust to a child's SSA disclosure (Saltzburg, 2004). Families that create a rigid protection of structural equilibrium are most likely to exhibit defenses against imbalance such as denial and avoidance (Bertone, 2003). Families that display balanced cohesion and regulatory structure will allow for family connection with individual differentiation, and family protection with individual exploration (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Families that value diversity are better able to tolerate variety within individuals (DeVine, 1983).

Normal life-stage changes require that the family be able to adjust to family members as they grow. It appears that the average age of SSA disclosure has been steadily declining over the past decade (Anhalt & Morris, 1998; Savin-Williams, 2005). More young people are recognizing their atypical sexual attraction in their early teens and "coming-out" during their mid-teens while they are living with their parents (D'Augelli, Grossman, Starks, 2005; Ryan, 2010). During this life-stage, parents tend to be more

entwined with their offspring; children are working through identity establishment while parents are struggling through the family stage of launching (Berk, 2006; Bertone, 2003; Saltzburg, 2004). When this life-stage coincides with an adolescent's SSA disclosure it adds another level of complexity to an already tumultuous time in the parent/child relationship (Davis, 2009). Therefore, a parent may be inundated with the feelings of loss of the child and loss of the future expectations for that child.

Predisclosure Religious Commitment. Finally, the way a family approaches their religious commitment may impact their resilience to a child's SSA disclosure. Traditional cultural influences tend to set up the dilemma of either acceptance of the child or rejection of the lifestyle (Bertone, 2003; Ryan, 2010; Walsh & Pryce, 2003). For many parents of faith, the teachings of their religion condemn homosexual activity. Some researchers believed that a state of cognitive dissonance occurred within an individual when their doctrine conflicted with the lifestyle of a loved one (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Lease & Shulman, 2003; Ryan, 2010). Lease and Shulman's (2003) study showed that many parents believed the apparent inconsistencies between their understanding of God's love for all and the institutional message that homosexual practices were sinful were due to church doctrines incompatible with the nature of God. Therefore, they may choose to stay and actively work towards change, leave the congregation in search of one that was more accepting of LGB individuals or leave the institutional church altogether. Despite these difficulties, most religiously committed parents felt that their faith had been crucial in helping them through their struggles.

Others may choose to hold fast to their convictions, rejecting the premise that God's love and doctrines proscribing homosexual activities are contradictory. They differentiate between God's love for all and his hate for all sin (Lease & Shulman, 2003). The greatest struggle in this position tends to be the secular rejection of separating the person from his or her actions (Herek, 1987).

Several studies suggested a positive correlation between homonegativity and theologically conservative ideologies (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek, 1987, 1994; Malcomnson, 2006; Ryan, 2010; Wilkinson, 2004). However, other studies indicated that Christians may tend to limit their homonegativity to moral rather than relational issues in that they did not appear to limit their interaction with gays and lesbians to any greater degree than with other "sinners" (Bassett, et al., 2000; Fulton, Gorsuch & Maynard, 1999). They propose that the prior studies found an intolerance of homosexual behaviors among the theologically conservative group rather than antihomosexual sentiments (Rosik, 2007).

Additionally, studies indicate that the interventions of education and exposure to people with homosexual orientations moderated students' opinions. Those who held an oppositional stance before interventions showed less opposition after, those who held a supportive stance before interventions displayed less support after (Bassett, 2005).

Therefore, it seems establishing a strong relationship with our children, keeping our family structure to some extent flexible through the life-stages and acquiring a greater understanding about homosexuality from a religious and practical perspective helps to increase a family's resilience to stresses related to a child's SSA disclosure. However, this

is not a certainty. Being proactive has advantages but does not prevent the experience of stress. Parents cannot plan their future emotional responses.

Disclosure Reactions. Parents experience a wide range of negative emotions upon learning that their child has same-sex attraction and, as discussed above, there is a vast array of factors that come into play to shape their responses and attenuate the intensity of the response. It appears that most families undergo a process to come to terms with their child's SSA disclosure. The process may be quickly resolved or it may never be resolved. The point is that a process seems to be a normal part of disclosure experience.

Within the disclosure phase, there appear to be two distinct processes families experience in their reaction: the initial reaction and the adjustment. Each of these processes can be understood as having positions along a continuum. On one end there is low reactivity and on the other end high reactivity. Additionally, each of these processes may be accomplished relatively quickly or may become stagnant.

Most LGB youths report negative or highly negative initial responses to their SSA disclosure (D'Augelli, Grossman, Starks, 2005; LaSala, 2000; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). They may experience verbal or physical violence, they may be ejected from the home or run away, or they may be ignored (Savin-Williams, 1998). They may be interrogated or they may be immediately accepted (LaSala, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1998). Much of this may be due to the relational, structural and religious factors previously discussed, but some of this may be due to the normal process of trying to comprehend the disclosure event. Parents may experience any one or more feelings such as anger, relief,

denial, acceptance, disbelief, worry, confusion, guilt, shame, fear, and loss as they process the disclosure (LaSala, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004).

Regardless of how accepting the parent is, he or she may be concerned with the consequences associated with SSA behaviors. Health concerns like AIDS and social concerns like hate crimes are common fears of parents (LaSala, 2000). For the Christian parent, the LGB lifestyle may be viewed as sinful; therefore, they may be concerned with their child's eternal spiritual condition (LaSala, 2000). Rejection of biblical teaching, denunciation of faith and dismissal from the faith community appear to be common fears of many Christian parents (LaSala, 2000; Lease & Shulman, 2003; Nugent, 1999; Saunders, 2004).

Stabilization. After the initial reaction comes a time of stabilization or adjustment to the SSA disclosure. This is typically a protracted process in which the family either resists the change brought about by the SSA disclosure or assimilates the new information and modifies their family structure accordingly (LaSala, 2000). Resistance may be an attempt to force the child to comply with the previously established family structure. Inflexible family systems tend to operate in this manner. The hope is by holding firm the child will come around and correct their behavior. However, research shows the usual result is that the child separates from the family due to the perceived lack of support (D'Augelli, Grossman, Starks, 2005; Holtzen, Kenny & Mahalik, 1995; LaSala, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams, 1998; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

LGB adolescents that have been banished from their home or have run away face a litany of dangers. Surviving on the streets, in shelters or in homes of non-family members

places the teen in unsafe situations. Studies have shown that homeless LGB teens face a dramatically increased risk of physical/sexual victimization, substance abuse, and mental disorders compared to their homeless heterosexual peers (Padilla, Crisp & Rew, 2010; Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, Tyler & Johnson, 2004). Unfortunately, there were no empirical comparisons to show if a LGB teen is safer at home even with the specter of domestic violence.

Some researchers suggest that the family adjustment process resembles the Kübler-Ross (1969) stages of grief as they work through letting go of past expectations and opening up to new possibilities (Bertone, 2003; LaSala, 2000). Families who cannot positively process their grief may stall and continue to ignore the reality of having a LGB child. They may lock into a pattern of blaming themselves, their spouse or others. The fabric of the family may begin to unravel and the parental dyad may be damaged or dissolved (Bertone, 2003; LaSala, 2000; Lease & Shulman, 2003; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams, 1998). Even families who appear to be able to process their grief may struggle over whether to disclose to others or keep the family secret (Salzberg, 2004).

Fortunately, it appears that even the most negative family reactions tend to subside and the family regains a sense of balance with the presence and acceptance of the LGB teen. While not all families make the required system changes, the typical family seems to follow the general pattern of negative disruption and relationship deterioration upon the initial SSA disclosure followed by a gradual improvement in family function and relationship restoration (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005; Grambling, Carr & McCain, 2000; Lease & Shulman, 2003; LaSala, 2000; Lewis, 1984; Oswald, 2002;

Patterson, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams, 1998; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

The most successful families tended to reevaluate their values and adjust to include the

LGB member. They learn new patterns of communication and styles of interaction that

replace the maladaptive ones. The quality of their relationships typically improved and

were even better due to the new found openness and integrity in the parent-child bond as

the parent exhibited an unconditional love for their child (Savin-Williams, 1998).

Specific Themes of Parental Response Toward Lesbian Children

Within the review of research, several themes arose to demonstrate the differences

that were present in the response of families to lesbian daughters compared to gay sons.

These themes were seen as having a significant impact on the way that families viewed

their lesbian daughters. The general themes were: identity development, relationship

development, and family development.

Identity Development. Current researchers approach the development of sexual

identity from the perspective that males and females develop along different trajectories.

Impacted by the work of writers such as Carol Gilligan (1982), researchers today view

women's identity development as subjectively based rather than objectively based.

Kirkpatrick (2002) believed that women's identity was internally based and men's identity

was externally based. As a result, the objects that characterize a woman's identity tended

to be internalized and symbolic, whereas men's identity objects tended to be externalized

and concrete. Women's identity goals were emotional connection whereas men's identity

goals were physical pleasure. Women measured success by emotional satisfaction,

whereas men measured success by performance. She believes that part of the explanation

for these differences was found in the physical development of females and males. From conception, a female's physical development was seen as fairly linear without dramatic alteration, whereas a male's physical development requires high levels of testosterone to modify the genital and brain structures, subsequently altering his motivational structures around his genitals.

Additionally, researchers propose that sexual attraction develops differently between females and males. Degges-White and Myers (2005) cited research that suggested females' sexual attractions began in childhood prior to completion of sexual development and during this time their affections were not gender specific. Males' sexual attractions began in puberty, in conjunction with sexual development and their desires were gender specific. Therefore, women's sexual attractions tended to be much more flexible and undefined, whereas men's sexual attractions tended to be more rigid and specific.

Finally, women's sexual identities were not as strictly constrained during the child and teen years. Diamond and Savin-Williams (2000) noted that social norms allowed emotional expression in relationships from an early age in females, but not so for males. Males were taught to repress their relationship emotions. The result was that girls were able to build strong emotional and physical bonds with other girls without social reprisal, whereas it was socially unacceptable for boys to emotionally and physically bond with other boys or girls during pre-puberty. It is not strange to see girls dancing, hugging, holding hands or kissing each other, but society would not tolerate the same behaviors in

boys. Therefore, females were allowed to form an identity that was more open to varied dimensions of relationship expression.

Relationship Development. Researchers also note the differences in the way women develop relationships. Scrivner and Eldridge (1995) and LaSala (2000) suggest that women approached relationship development from the perspective of connectedness and nurturance. They equate intimacy with close friendship and connectedness with emotional depth. Therefore, their relationships tend toward fewer, deeper, more committed monogamous bonding. Males, on the other hand, approach relationships from an individual and functional perspective. Intimacy is equated to sexual expression and connection is viewed as physical/sexual. Therefore, they tend to have more, superficial, less committed and polygamous relationships. Laird (2003) found that it is common for gay men to engage in sex with strangers, thereby receiving the physical satisfaction without the emotional commitment.

As a result of their emotional flexibility, women seemed to be able to tolerate more inconsistencies between their sexual attraction and the object of their affections (Lewis, 1984). Women could be happy with a much wider variation in relationship configuration. Men's emotional inflexibility seemed to make them intolerant to sexual attraction inconsistencies. Once they invested in a relationship orientation, they tended to be more militant in preserving it (Kirkpatrick, 2000). It would appear that the deeper and more flexible SSA relationships of women may make them more stable and easier for others to accept (Degges-White and Myers, 2005; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000).

Family Development. Family structures are built upon rules and expectations (Balswick & Balswick, 2007). A child's sexual development introduces several implicit and explicit expectations within a family. For men, these may include an acceptance that males are sexually oriented creatures who experiment but ultimately become attracted to females. Their role in the social structure tends to be defined by physical and financial support; therefore, they will fix the car and work toward economic stability.

For women, the expectations seem to center around the care and nurturance of the family system. Most parents presume their daughters will grow up to marry and have children (LaSala, 2000). Studies indicated that women tended to hold the principal cohesive bond upon which the family depended (Silverstien & Bengtson, 2000). Daughters, sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and the like were the primary caregivers to the family. They held the role of kinkeeper (Walker, Manoogian-O'Dell, McGraw & White, 2000). They were responsible for keeping the family connected, maintaining the family history, and encouraging cross-generational relationships. These expectations may explain why Herdt and Koff (2000) found that parents had more difficulty accepting a daughter as lesbian than a son as gay; a woman who demonstrated SSA may be viewed by their family of origin as abdicating their familial role.

Studies seem to confirm this perspective. Research suggests that sons but not daughters felt protected by their mother (Savin-Williams, 1998). More lesbian daughters than gay sons reported that mothers were psychologically abusive (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005). Lesbian daughters were more likely than gay sons to feel rejected by at least one parent (Savin-Williams, 1998). They had a much greater expectation that they

would be evicted from their parent's home (D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2005). They also expressed difficulty in talking openly about sexual matters to their fathers and tended to be less "out" to fathers than gay sons (Savin-Williams, 1998).

Conclusion

Even for the most resilient family, disclosure of the SSA of their daughter can place powerful stressors on the family system that they may be unable to manage by themselves. Unfortunately, the family may find very few support resources on which they can depend because they tend to live in sociocultural contexts that are homophobic (Bertone, 2005; Laird, 2003). Traditional religious organizations may be seen as homosexual condemning (Lease & Shulman, 2003). Religious communities may be seen as defensive toward LGB individuals; they are perceived as viewing these LGBs as threats to their children, marriage, family and society (Laird, 2003). Positive efforts, short of complete acceptance, are viewed as hypocritical (Herek, 1987; Kinnaman, 2007; Walsh & Pryce, 2003). Therefore, parents may find that they have lost their faith community support during a time when they need it the most (Lease & Shulman, 2003).

CHAPTER 5 – A FAMILY CASE STUDY

Introduction

Stephen and Darlene[1] were 50 and 47 years old respectively, white, upper middle class, and college educated. They had been married for 25 years. Neither had been married before. They lived in a Southern New England state. Both were members and regular attendees of a local Baptist church. They had two daughters; Rebecca was 22 and Amy was 20.

Stephen and Darlene met at a Bible Study for college students. They were each invited by a mutual friend. At that time, both Stephen and Darlene were non-practicing Catholics and had not attended a church since their early teens. They saw no value in their early religious experiences, so they did not "waste their time on useless endeavors." But they were intrigued when discussing the claims of the Bible and were especially convinced by the rhetorical argument of C. S. Lewis: "Either this [Jesus] was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse" (Lewis, 1996, p. 56). Stephen and Darlene accepted Christ as Savior on the same day. They said, "We were born again together like twins and we have been inseparable ever since."

Stephen and Darlene dated for a couple of years and married a few months after Darlene graduated from college. They were married in a small Baptist church; it was the church they attended during their college years. It was a small wedding with just family and close friends in attendance. Both Stephen and Darlene found jobs in the area; Darlene

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[1] The names of the family members in this case study and some of their demographic details have been changed to protect their identities.

as a nurse and Stephen as an accountant for a local business. They saved every dime they could and were able to purchase a home a few years later.

Darlene left her nursing job when their first daughter, Rebecca, was born. They had learned to live very simply, so the loss of the second income did not create a financial problem for them. They considered it a blessing that Darlene could stay at home and raise their children. They were more than willing to sacrifice the "extras of life for the essentials of raising children." Amy was born two years later. Complications in the delivery caused some severe damage to Darlene's reproductive system requiring a partial hysterectomy and left her unable to bear more children. Stephen and Darlene considered that "God's way of telling us we were done having kids."

Stephen and Darlene negotiated roles early in their marriage. They accepted rather traditional roles with Stephen being the primary provider and Darlene being the primary caregiver. Stephen would take care of the finances since that was his area of expertise and Darlene would be responsible for the care of the family since that was consistent with her knowledge and abilities. Stephen took care of home and car repairs, he did the landscaping and yard maintenance, and he planned the family vacations. Darlene did the housekeeping, grocery shopping and most of the cooking; however, Stephen could cook too and would do so about once a week.

Stephen and Darlene largely avoided marital conflict through the early years of their marriage by "establishing expectations and sticking to the plan." They recall that their only area of conflict was related to their parents' opinions in the areas of religion and raising children. Stephen and Darlene were deeply committed to their faith and their

church community. Stephen was a leader in his church and taught adult classes. Darlene was a teacher for the children's ministries and enjoyed singing in the choir. They were part of a small group and had become very close with the others in their group. They said, "up until now, there was nothing that we couldn't share with our small group– it was a safe place to really be yourself."

Background: Family of Origin

Both families of origin were Caucasian and intact. Stephen's parents came to the United States right after the end of World War II, during the start of the Greek Civil War. His parents, Jason and Dorothy, traveled on the same steamship that came into New York but they didn't know each other until they met at a Greek Orthodox Church a few months later. Both Jason and Dorothy were skilled tailors and started a tailoring business in the city. Jason and Dorothy were married and Stephen was born several years later, the second of three children. His siblings are Timothy and Sophia; they are both married and live in different parts of the country. Stephen rarely sees or talks to his siblings; their relationships would seem to be indifferent.

Both Darlene's parents were from English descent, tracing their immigration to the U.S. in the late 1500s during the persecution of Roman Catholics by the Church of England and Elizabeth I. Alan and Kathy were married and lived in Rhode Island. Alan was a foreman at a textile mill and Kathy a homemaker. Darlene was born the first of two children. She has a younger brother, Paul, who is married and lives in the southeast. They talk regularly and seem to have a normal if distant relationship.

Stephen and Darlene reported that there had been no divorce in either of their families as far back as they could trace. Both families were committed Catholics and very traditional in their views of family, religion and politics. Neither Stephen nor Darlene recalled their parents ever fighting or arguing, at least not in front of them or their siblings. They remembered that there was always order and any tension was in the expectation to keep that order; any behaviors that ran contrary to their parents' expectations were quickly addressed with the "firm hand" of their respective fathers. Stephen and Darlene commented that they felt safe knowing their boundaries.

Stephen's family was highly affectionate, with hugging and kissing being the norm in greeting family members and friends. They were open with their verbal praise but equally verbal about any issues of displeasure. As Stephen put it, "You never have to wonder what they are thinking; they will readily tell you if they don't like the way you part your hair."

Darlene's family was not as openly affectionate. Hugs seemed to be reserved for mother and children, and between female family members. Darlene could not recall ever being hugged by her dad. Handshakes were the greeting norm for the males of this family. Darlene reported that her family was different in that they rarely shared praises openly; however, they were very similar to Stephen's in their willingness to share their opinion about "what everyone else needs to do."

It was interesting that despite some differences, both Stephen and Darlene found comfort in the boundaries of roles their respective families maintained but they did not seem to recognize the relative lack of boundaries around individuals or couples within that

system. The closest they came during our initial interviews was to admit they struggled with some of the expectations their respective families had for them as a couple and with their children.

Early Marriage History

Stephen and Darlene both agreed that the first real issue in their relationship came as a result of their coming to faith in Christ. Both families viewed this as a rejection of their upbringing and religious loyalties. For both families, the change signaled the danger of committing a mortal sin by rejecting the sacraments of the Eucharist and confession. Since both Stephen and Darlene were considered Catholic, even if not the same ecclesiastical branch, their respective families did not charge the other partner with leading their child astray; both families blamed their own child for the "sin." Every time they would attend family events, they knew that there would be at least one comment, from someone, about their "cult."

The situation escalated when Stephen and Darlene became engaged and announced they were getting married in a Baptist church. To their families, they were now rejecting the sacrament of Catholic marriage and the expectations to raise their children Catholic. At first, both families were refusing to attend the wedding. They said "while we love you, we cannot show support for something that would condemn you to hell." Stephen and Darlene were on their own to plan and pay for their wedding; so, it would be a modest wedding with only close friends. But, in the days leading up to the wedding, both families relented and they attended the wedding. Stephen and Darlene knew it would be more than

they could hope to have their parents truly enjoy this special day; but they were happy they did not miss it.

After the wedding, things quieted down a bit; their families did not bring up the matter for quite some time, that was until Stephen and Darlene began to talk about having children. "We don't know whether [our families] thought we might not have children or were waiting for the topic to come up, but as soon as we began to talk about kids, the religion debates started heating up again." They said that there seemed to be more intensity to their families' arguments, almost a "deadly urgency" about their tone. The situation came to a head soon after Darlene gave birth to Rebecca. Both families seemed to be hoping, maybe even expecting, that somehow Stephen and Darlene would have Rebecca christened; but when that did not occur "it was like a bubble popped … [our families] became intensely angry with several huge battles and then they completely withdrew and gave us the silent treatment for several weeks."

Stephen and Darlene wondered if somehow their respective families were conspiring against them because it seemed all too coincidental that both families would escalate the conflict and then withdraw at about the same time. It seemed unlikely because they had never seen their parents discussing any matter, let alone having a conversation about religion. But how could they explain this?

The silent treatment ended very soon and rather suddenly. "One day, my mother just showed up at the door and asked to come in," Darlene said. "It was strange because she never knocked before but simply let herself in and called out for me. But here she was, knocking and asking for permission to come in and see the baby." Within the next

couple days, both sets of parents had made a visit to the house "but neither of them talked about the blowout," said Stephen. "They all just acted as though nothing happened. But things were not the same." Both Stephen and Darlene said that their families did not express their opinions with them as they did before. They said that in a way it was nice not to have the conflict, the guilt feelings, the judgmental attitudes about their decisions but it was hard because "they just didn't seem like our parents anymore," Stephen said. "It was hard but we had each other and it kind of drew us together even more [as a couple]."

As the years passed, the families began to share their perspectives but never as they had before. Certain issues were "off limits," including religion and politics. However, "they would express their opinion about our parenting," said Stephen. This became a source of conflict between Stephen and Darlene. For example, if Stephen's mother commented on the way Amy was dressed, he would talk to Darlene about it and they would inevitably get into an argument.

One intense and long-standing quarrel involved Amy's propensity to act like a tomboy. The older Amy became, the more she displayed her enjoyment of "all things rough and dirty." Amy did not play house or dolls with the girls in the neighborhood but preferred playing baseball and football with the boys. Stephen smiled and laughed saying, "The thing is she was really good. She was better than most of the boys in the neighborhood – even some of the older ones. But it always made me feel like there was something wrong about it. I didn't like my little girl getting all physical with the boys. I was afraid of what that all might lead to."

Darlene did not want to deny Amy's desire to play in the way that seemed natural to her. So, this became a source of disagreement between Stephen and Darlene. Stephen would sometimes win out and Amy would be forbidden to play with the boys. But because Stephen and Darlene were not unified, the ban was not consistently enforced creating tension between Stephen and Amy. As Amy became older, she began asserting that Stephen did not accept her for who she was; she felt he did not value her abilities. She would also get upset with Darlene for not providing better support against Stephen's "unreasonable expectations."

They tried several alternative responses to Amy. They had her try girls' sports like softball, field hockey, cross country, and lacrosse, but Amy never found it satisfactory and would quit. She became moody and withdrawn, which Stephen simply associated with entering puberty. Her school work was average "because she did not put in the work to get good grades," Stephen recalled. Darlene tried to convince Stephen that she needed a healthy outlet to help her express her gifts, but they could never agree to what that would be. As time passed, so did the conflict. Amy did not push the issue and, therefore, Stephen and Darlene did not argue about it.

Rebecca, on the other hand, was "a real girly girl." She enjoyed playing dress-up and dolls with the girls, and she liked helping Darlene bake. Rebecca would cuddle with her "Daddy" – they were very affectionate with one another. She was an excellent student, always part of the popular crowd. She was a student leader at school and in her youth group at church. Everyone seemed to love Rebecca. In her early teens, her close girlfriends showed little interest in pairing off with boys. They would be with boys in large

groups to do things like go to movies and the mall but they did not "go steady" like many others of the girls their age. It wasn't until Rebecca's senior year of high school that she met a boy, part of a new family that moved into the area and began attending their church. Up to this point, Stephen and Darlene had no concerns at all for Rebecca. They spent all of their time worrying and sometimes disagreeing about Amy.

Stephen and Darlene found they had no reason to be concerned that Rebecca had found her "true love;" both parents adored him. Rebecca and Todd were part of a group of students that decided to make a pledge of celibacy and protect their virginity for marriage. They were both accepted to a Christian college and became very active in campus ministries, church ministries and overseas missionary work during their college years. During their last year of college, Todd and Rebecca became engaged. Todd even asked Stephen for Rebecca's hand in marriage. They set the date for after graduation, the following fall.

Amy graduated from high school and decided to go to the community college for a degree in accounting. It was there that she met some new friends and seemed to become more positive. She and her new friends would meet at the library and study together, which was a great encouragement to Stephen and Darlene. "We thought, 'This is just what she needed, a new perspective on life.'" Amy graduated and got a job as a bookkeeper at a local specialty store.

Presenting Problem

The wedding of their daughter Rebecca was shaping up to be a lovely event. In some ways Stephen and Darlene hoped this wedding would bring the whole family

together in a way that their wedding could not. They vested much of themselves in the planning and enjoyed the process. However, Stephen and Darlene's joy was squelched by Amy's announcement within weeks prior to the wedding. She declared that she was lesbian and would be moving in with her "life-partner" Victoria. For Stephen, this was a complete shock and he "could not handle it." He left the room, got into his car and drove away. Amy remarked, "See, I always said that Dad did not accept me for who I am, and this proves it yet again."

Once the word reached Stephen and Darlene's parents, the pressure accelerated. Both parents were quick to say that this situation was due to poor parenting and the lack of the protection of the Church. They were convinced that if Stephen and Darlene were married Catholic and baptized their children Catholic, all would be well. They claimed that Rebecca was a blessing despite the circumstances.

Stephen and Darlene did all they could to "hold it together for Rebecca and Todd." They were able to somehow maintain the appearance of normalcy as Darlene helped Rebecca plan for her wedding. But the stress was building and was violently released within weeks following Rebecca and Todd's wedding. Both Stephen and Darlene had a "major meltdown" that nearly caused them to seek a divorce. Stephen left once and didn't come back for over a week; he nearly lost his job due to that absence. They said some hurtful things to each other; they screamed and yelled at each other.

They kept this all to themselves. They did not share it with their church community. No matter how safe they thought their small group was, they felt they could not share this. Stephen felt shame and guilt, and feared he would lose the respect of the

people of the church – he might even be asked to step down from the leadership position because he could not "manage his family" (ref. I Tim 3:4-5). They did not share their feelings with their families because they felt their parents would have no compassion; rather, they would just make them feel worse.

Stephen and Darlene sought the help of a pastor but not their own pastor. They reasoned that since this pastor was not associated with their congregation, he would be able to maintain objectivity in helping them deal with their problems. And since he was in the midst of receiving his doctorate in Family and Marriage Counseling, he might have the tools necessary to assist them.

Initial Assessment

While the presenting issues were family systems issues, the couple initially did not want to include other members of the family. Therefore, the counseling task was approached with the perspective that bringing healthy functioning to the couple would support healthy function of the family. Hope was held out that future counseling opportunities might open up the possibilities of having the whole family together in counseling sessions.

The couple was self-referred. The chief complaint presented was their stressed and fractured relationship. They reported, "We came so close to a divorce; now we want to repair our marriage." Neither Stephen nor Darlene reported any developmental issues. Stephen reported minor hypertension that is controlled via 50 mg of Atenolol. Darlene stated that other than her previously mentioned delivery complications when Amy was

born, she has experienced no other medical conditions. Neither reported any prior psychiatric issues.

The overall appearance of the couple was very good. They were well dressed and groomed. They were a reasonably physically fit and attractive couple. Their cognitive functioning was excellent. Both displayed well organized thinking, abstract reasoning, good judgment and excellent memory recall. It was very clear that this couple was very intelligent and had an exceptional capacity to learn. There were no indications of perceptional issues like hallucinations, delusions or depersonalization. Both clients reported no prior suicidal or homicidal ideations.

While it is common to code a multiaxial assessment for each client, this author has chosen to code the assessment for the marriage with the view that the marriage relationship is the client (Worthington, 1999), not the husband and/or wife. Therefore, the initial intake multiaxial assessment for the couple was coded as follows:

Axis I   309.24   Adjustment Disorder with Anxiety - Acute
            V61.10   Partner Relational Problem
            V61.20   Parent-Child Relational Problem
Axis II   none
Axis III   none
Axis IV   Problems with primary support group   – Family of Origin discord
            Problems relating to social environment   – fear of discrimination or
                                                         judgment
Axis V   GAF 70

The clinical diagnosis of Adjustment Disorder was especially noted in Stephen, due to the development of emotional and behavioral symptoms that have occurred in response to an identifiable stressor within a very short time of the announcement of his daughter's lesbian relationship. The symptoms or behaviors were clinically significant as evidenced

by Stephen leaving for nearly a week, jeopardizing his marriage and his livelihood. Also, there has been significant impairment in social and occupational function as evidenced by his pulling back from relating to his small group, the struggles with Darlene and the effort it requires for him to get through his work day. The disorder has been specified as "with anxiety" due to his restless and worried state, and as "acute" since symptoms have lasted less than 6 months to date (APA, 2000, pg. 679-683).

There may also be an Adjustment Disorder apparent in Darlene as indicated by her initiation of divorce threats. The couple reported that Darlene initiated the divorce idea about a month after Rebecca got married, almost two months after Amy moved in with Victoria. Darlene insists that it had nothing to do with Stephen's excessive responses. Stephen and Darlene had reportedly taken care of that "problem" within days of his returning. So, as strong as their relationship appeared to be, how did they begin to talk about dissolving it? It may have been that there were fissures in the relationship that became exacerbated by Amy's disclosure and Stephen's response.

Couple and Family Assessment

The assessment of the couple was performed in two steps: (1) utilize self-reporting instruments and (2) conduct face to face interviews with the couple. The two instruments used were Prepare/Enrich (Olson, 2008), and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES IV) (Olson, 2007). These provided information and understanding into some of the foundational beliefs and environmental factors behind the couple's presenting problems.

The Prepare/Enrich instrument was intended to provide an understanding of the couple's insight into their experiences in their respective families of origin and their nuclear family, along with attitudes and expectations across a wide variety of subjects. The results indicated that the couple was best categorized as a Vitalized Couple. According to Prepare-Enrich, vitalized couples typically have many strength areas and a high level of relationship satisfaction. Still, they may have some growth areas in their relationship that can be improved. Strong relationship skills should provide a good foundation for improving any growth areas. The core scales are a measurement of Positive Couple Agreement (PCA). All of the core scales indicated relationship strength (PCA = 80-100%) or possible relationship strength (PCA = 50-70%). Their reported strengths were in the areas of communication (PCA=80%), financial management (PCA=90%), sexual relationship (PCA=90%), and spiritual beliefs (PCA=100%). Overall couple satisfaction was rated very high (90%). The Personal Stress Profile for both Stephen and Darlene was very high (90%). This indicator examined each individual's personal stress level over the last year based on responses to 25 common sources of personal stress. Their top reported stressors were parents, children and feeling emotionally upset.

The SCOPE Personality Scales consist of five dimensions based on the Five Factor Model of Personality. These five dimensions are social, change, organized, pleasing, and emotionally steady. The couple scored average or above average in all except emotional steadiness. They both reportedly enjoyed social settings but valued their privacy. They reported to be open to change and organized in their daily life and work. They scored

average in pleasing, indicating that they both valued being considerate and cooperative in their interactions with others but they still had the ability to assert themselves when they felt boundaries are being violated. Their emotional steadiness was reported low reflecting the inability to stay calm and relaxed when faced with stress. They seemed to have the tendency to be more reactive to stress in their life; they were emotionally sensitive, easily upset, and prone to anxiety, anger or depression. They reported being fragile or overly sensitive. Couples that both scored low in this area seem to lack the stabilizing factor needed to work through stressful situations. This may, in fact, exacerbate tensions in otherwise mildly stressful situations.

The Couple Map (Appendix 1) showed Stephen and Darlene in the balanced range of flexibility and closeness. They both were connected and somewhat flexible. This meant they seemed to experience a healthy balance of "We" and "I" or closeness and separateness, which reflected an interdependent relationship; this allowed each partner to foster connection, leaving room for growth and development as individuals. They also tended to be more constant and less open to change. They valued the leadership or roles they had established in their relationship and were likely to resist changes even in the midst of the demands of life.

According to the Family Map, both families of origin were unbalanced as overly connected and inflexible. Therefore, it appeared that both Stephen and Darlene grew up in families that were tightly enmeshed, highly valuing closeness and loyalty. The families were also rigid, maintaining a high level of structure and organization, with leadership,

decision making and roles being clearly defined and inflexible. Family systems like these tend to be highly susceptible to stress induced system dysfunction.

The FACES IV tool was intended to provide a look into their relationship strengths and weaknesses, and their general satisfaction in their family relationships. Results (Appendix 2 & 3) showed a high level of agreement in most all of the scales. They agreed that their family was flexibly unbalanced, had a low tendency to disengage, moderately enmeshed, somewhat high rigidity and low tendency toward chaos. They also agreed that their family communication and satisfaction was low. They disagreed on the balance of family cohesion. Stephen saw the family as highly cohesive and Darlene saw cohesiveness as low. If Stephen's perspective was accepted, then their family would seem to fall into the second of six family types, rigidly cohesive.

According to the authors (Olsen & Gorall, 2006), rigidly cohesive is characterized by high closeness and rigid, moderate change and enmeshed, and low disengaged and chaos. This family type has as its hallmark high degrees of emotional closeness and high degrees of rigidity. This family type would be hypothesized to function well at times given their high degree of closeness. However, they may have difficulty making the changes required by situational or developmental changes due to their high rigidity (pg. 8).

It was not surprising that the outcome of the Circumplex model from FACES was very similar to the Couple Map of Prepare-Enrich. Stephen indicated that their family was very connected and somewhat flexible, and Darlene considered their family to be connected and somewhat flexible. This small discrepancy was easily understood by a minor difference in perspective.

The interviews provided the opportunity to hear the couple express their understanding of the presenting problems. Using the results of the self-report instruments, they were encouraged to freely convey their thoughts and feelings without much prompting or directing so as to avoid leading the couple unduly. Reflective questions where used to move the narrative along when the couple began to be sidetracked. Through these interviews, a more accurate picture of the situation was developed and a genogram (Appendix 4) was created.

A genogram is considered a snapshot of a specific time in the life of a family. It graphically displays the relationship dynamics using various line styles to represent relationship types. The relationship dynamics of this family was in constant flux and the connections they had with one another subject to change. At the time of the interview, the families of origin had cut-off relationship from the couple; however, they both maintained enmeshed connections within each of their respective family groups. The family showed enmeshed connections between Stephen, Darlene and Rebecca. Stephen and Amy displayed a conflicted relationship, and Darlene and Amy showed a focused relationship style. Rebecca and Amy reportedly had a close friendship connection.

Reportedly, Rebecca and Amy did not have an overly involved relationship. This appears to be consistent with the established family dynamics where their enmeshment is normative from one generation to the other but not between family members of the same generation. While very little time was spent discussing this dynamic, it appears that siblings in each of the two generations represented displayed friendship style relationships and did not show the kind of controlling behaviors demonstrated between generations.

Finally, Stephen and Darlene seemed to display a loving acceptance of Todd, and distrust and ambivalence respectively toward Victoria.

There were three inconsistencies of note between the couple's self-report, the results from the instruments, and their narrative. The first was the couple's claim about their strong communication abilities. While the couple's communication skills seemed to be effective during peaceful seasons of life, they seemed to lack the ability to communicate effectively during stressful periods. Prepare/Enrich picked up on this by reporting their tendency to be reactive to stress, and appear fragile or overly sensitive. Therefore, their communication skills would be impacted by their emotional sensitivity in that they could become upset, angry or depressed. This interpretation seemed to be supported by their family narrative. The couple demonstrated that their interpersonal strategy for coping with stress was pursuit/withdrawal. This tactic does not support effective communication.

Second was the assertion that they were open to change. Once again, the instruments and the narrative helped to uncover the couple's tendency to become rigid and less open to change, especially during times of change. Instead, they prefer stability and work hard to maintain it. They experienced long periods of consistency in their marriage and found that they could explore alternatives during this time of security. However, when change was imposed on them, they became resistant to those external demands and retreated from them.

Finally, it was curious that the couple's PCA score showed a possible strength for the Friends and Family category of Prepare/Enrich (50%). Given their story and the stresses they reported, it was expected that this indicator would be an area of growth.

Not only did they experience a general lack of support from their family of origin and alienation from their daughter, but they did not trust that their faith community could handle the SSA disclosure of their daughter and feared rejection. It would appear that each of these inconsistencies can be explained as being aspirational rather than factual experiences. They aspired toward strong communication, flexibility and connectedness to family and friends; however, their stressful situation exposed their need to strengthen these areas of their lives.

Analysis of Family Dynamics

It was apparent that the couple was under a great deal of stress. They displayed a full range of emotions in the initial session, especially as they talked about their family history. They showed a great deal of concern, disappointment, some anger and fear, and hopelessness when talking about their youngest daughter, Amy. Stephen displayed some shame when Darlene recalled Amy's statement that he never accepted her for who she was. He admitted that he struggled with the issue of homosexuality and accepting this as part of his daughter's identity.

All indications were that the couple's relationship problems were centered on Amy and her life choice, and not a direct relationship issue between Stephen and Darlene. Darlene indicated that Stephen would become angry every time the issue was raised; she felt that he wanted to just ignore the issue and "pretend it didn't exist." Darlene said, "She's our daughter. No matter what she has done, she is still our daughter. We cannot ignore her." Stephen reported that it was a timing issue; Darlene would bring up the issue when he came home from work and "that was the last thing I wanted to get into after a

long day at the office." Concern for Amy seemed to be the only thing they would talk about; it overtook every conversation.

Stephen and Darlene seemed to have no positive support system around them. They felt it was wrong to discuss this issue with Rebecca and Todd. They could not talk to their respective parents or siblings because they felt they would continue to be blamed for the situation. They had no one in their congregation that they trusted could handle this information without their being judged as poor parents and Stephen especially feared being judged a poor Christian leader. So they were left with only each other and they could not seem to talk about it without it escalating into a fight.

Stephen indicated that he had been having some trouble sleeping and was easily fatigued. Darlene stated that they both were very irritable, restless and anxious ever since Amy announced her decision. Stephen said that there were some days when it took every ounce of strength to get through the work day, to concentrate on his job and keep anyone from knowing what was happening in his life.

The interpersonal dynamics of the family system would seem to show that they all share a common internal working model that reveals an anxious-avoidant attachment style. They each hold out the aspiration and want to be able to depend on each other, and they seem to have found sufficient moments in the past that would reinforce the hope that they can. However, during times of stress, they seem to vacillate between expectations of support and rejection. It may be the infrequency of stressful events have kept them from concluding that there would be no support and adjusting to a strictly avoidant attachment style.

Stephen and Darlene had several great strengths on their side. They appeared very much in love with one another and strongly motivated to strengthen their relationship. They had apparently maintained their faith despite harassment and alienation from their families of origin, upheld each other during Darlene's health crisis, and drawn closer to each other during their 25 years of marriage. They seemed to have successfully raised two healthy children in a marriage-centered family. They demonstrated the values of a strong faith and membership in a faith community. They displayed Christian stewardship in the giving of their time, talents and treasures to the kingdom of God.

However, they were not the "perfect" Christian couple. Stephen and Darlene appeared to have replicated in their family system a few of the dysfunctional behaviors present in their families of origin. Their families of origin tended to be rather rigid and enmeshed with each other, having fairly impermeable boundaries around their immediate family and overly permeable boundaries within the immediate family. When Stephen and Darlene were rejected by their respective families, they closed themselves off to protect themselves and their children from the negative influences. They went from one extreme, having overly permeable boundaries with their families of origin, to the other extreme, having impermeable boundaries.

It is quite common for individuals to revert to familiar but dysfunctional patterns of behavior when under duress. They may simply repeat what seemed to work in their family system to bring about equilibrium (Balswick & Balswick, 2006). With Stephen and Darlene, since they both learned to live by balancing an overly rigid and enmeshed family system, it was a normative response for them to disengage with their families of origin, no

matter how unhealthy that might be. Therefore, in this system, it was normal to sever

relationships in an attempt "to maintain the homeostatic equilibrium of the family system"

(Nichols, 2006, p. 53).

Both Stephen and Darlene reported that they never observed their parents in

conflict with each other. Therefore, they did not have modeled for them positive conflict

management and resolution skills. Instead, they perceived that conflict was not a normal

part of the marriage relationship. While there certainly had been conflict between Stephen

and Darlene throughout the years, their typical conflict mode was avoidance and

repression. When severe conflict arose, they did not have the skills to handle it and their

typical mode did not function well. Stephen reported that he was afraid of what he might

do with his anger which caused him to hide until he could gain control over his emotions;

he seems to have some anger-management issues.

The conflict management Stephen and Darlene experienced within their families of

origin involved the consequences of violations to parental expectations. If they or their

siblings failed to meet family standards, the punishment was rejection until the child

repented. Conflict resolution meant conforming to the norms of the family to avoid or

reverse condemnation. So, when the paternal grandmother disapproved of Amy's attire,

Stephen brought the issue to Darlene for correction.

Family roles were very important in this family system, especially for Stephen.

Stephen was the provider and protector. Darlene was expected to be the nurturer and

enforcer. Rebecca appeared to be the compliant child and Amy, the oppositional child. It

appeared that the children each found their way to "fit in" and receive attention. Darlene

and Stephen's attention was understandably given primarily to Rebecca leading up to the wedding. It may be that Amy felt left out.

Stephen and Darlene selected very few close friends from their church and these friends were very limited in access to the inner family, likely because they wanted to control the outside influence and protect against possible toxic effects to their family. They never considered seeking counsel from friends while they raised their children; they remained isolated and private. Stephen and Darlene apparently did not trust the church to respond supportively to them. Stephen worried that he would lose his standing in the church if they found out Amy was a lesbian.

Stephen and Darlene appeared to be overly involved in their children's lives and tried to dictate behaviors according to traditional expectations. When Amy did not live up to those expectations, they exhibited disappointment, which she apparently interpreted as rejection. When she rebelled and made her decision to live a lesbian lifestyle, Stephen and Darlene seemed to have taken ownership of the responsibility for Amy's SSA, feeling like they failed as parents to teach proper moral values.

The Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems proposes that balanced couples and families generally function better, have a greater repertoire of coping skills, and are able to change their cohesion and flexibility levels to deal with stress or developmental changes. Both the families of origin and the client system were reported to be unbalanced according to both Prepare/Enrich and FACES IV. Their rigidity and enmeshment made it difficult for them to cope with change and the stress that came with change since they had relatively few coping skills at their disposal. The families of origin

became dysfunctional and cut-off their children when their "normative expectations" were no longer accepted by their children. Stephen and Darlene found a new norm but replicated the same rigidity and enmeshment resulting in dysfunction when Amy strayed from their "normative expectations" (Gorall, 1995, pp. 218-9).

Stephen and Darlene felt isolated and alone. They did not have their respective families for support. Further, they appeared to have transferred onto the church the same expected response of rejection they had received from their families and they would not talk to their older daughter and her husband because they said they wanted to protect them from the situation. Further, they are divided because Darlene was trying to advocate for her prodigal daughter, Amy, which Stephen interpreted as a lack of support to his position. So, Darlene seemed to take on the role of pursuer and Stephen, the role of the withdrawer.

According to Stanley, Trathen, McCain and Bryan (1998), the pursuer is the partner who tries to initiate discussions and get decisions made; the withdrawer is the partner who tries to avoid the issues and flees. "Studies show that men are more likely to be in the withdrawing role, with women tending to pursue" (p. 40). The reason one partner tends to withdraw is because they do "not feel safe to stay in the argument – not emotionally safe" (p. 40). Additionally, Stephen and Darlene's behaviors demonstrate the fight-or-flight response, an internal process that prepares an individual for struggle or escape. Stephen appeared to respond with "flight" in a crisis situation, whereas Darlene seemed to response with "fight" (Palmer & Dryden, 1995).

Whereas Darlene and Stephen normally exhibited excellent communication skills, it appeared that their response to stress had substantially disabled their communication functioning. Creating a safe place for both Stephen and Darlene to talk through their expectations, fears, frustrations, disappointments, and the like, seemed to be a key to helping them get through their crisis. Teaching them to structure their interactions might help them to deal with sensitive issues in a more healthy way. The Speaker-Listener Technique described by Stanley, Trathen, McCain and Bryan (1998) would be "one very simple way to be 'quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to become angry' (Jas 1:19) and thereby limit the damage that [unhealthy] patterns … can cause" (p. 65). The answer would be to find some way to have respectful and clear dialogue while discussing difficult issues – creating a safe place to talk.

They also may have inherited their families' unreasonable expectation that being a good Christian meant bad things do not happen to you. By and large, Stephen and Darlene had enjoyed a relatively crisis-free marriage and this supposition had not really been tested until the SSA disclosure crisis. However, all of the church services, volunteering, Christian teaching, tithing and "[training] a child in the way he should go" (Prov 22:6) did not protect them from the heartbreak of a prodigal child. The crisis was not only a violation of "normative expectations" but also a crisis of faith, especially for Stephen. The challenge for him was to understand the role of a loving father who patiently and expectantly awaits the return of his wayward child. He needed to resist the urge to cut off Amy in the way that his parents did to him.

An additional theological dilemma for Stephen may have been the belief that sexual sins are in some way more sinful than other disobedient acts. Stephen appeared to be struggling with the reality that his daughter was living a lesbian lifestyle. This may have been a parallel fear to his parent's fear of Stephen's mortal sins in rejecting the Catholic sacraments. Countless generations of Christians have believed there were some sins that were more sinful and deadly than others. Certainly, in this life, there are greater consequences for some sins, but all sin is just as horrible in the eyes of God.

Examination of Common Themes

Two broad themes seem to arise out of the analysis of the family dynamics. First, there appears to be a reoccurring theme of family members struggling for the power to control their family environment. The second theme appears to be the cognitive dissonance experienced by family members as they attempt to rectify two conflicting values. Analysis of the dynamics of this family system led to the creation of the Cognitive Dissonance Response Model (Appendix 5). This chart shows the relationship between the conflicting values, triggering events, controlling behaviors and reciprocal effects of those behaviors. It is a summary of the following explanation.

Each family of origin worked to maintain the power of environmental control. They attempted to direct their children's spiritual lives by expressing the expectations that they should attend the Catholic Church for the protection derived from the Sacraments of Confession, the Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, Baptism and Confirmation. Each of these expectations was violated when Stephen and Darlene decided to attend, marry and raise their children in a non-Catholic Church. Their control seemed to be motivated by the fear

of mortal sins and the indelible marks they leave on one's soul. They were concerned that their children and grandchildren may experience eternal damnation for their sins. The respective paternal and maternal grandparents first initiated a battle for compliance, which included reasoning, shaming and threatening. When that failed, they resorted to rejection and banishment. After a short while, when they still failed to gain compliance, they instituted a tactic of denial and avoidance; this final step helped to regain family stability by ignoring the perceived problem.

Stephen seemed to replicate his family's control model and processes. He attempted to direct Amy's relational life by expressing the expectations that girls engage in gender appropriate activities and dress in gender appropriate clothing. His motivation was to protect his daughter from the threat of early sexual activity precipitated by her activities with predominately male friends. He first initiated a battle for compliance, which included reasoning, shaming, and threatening. When Amy did not comply, he resorted to passive rejection by ignoring her and giving his attentions to Rebecca. When Amy disclosed her SSA, Stephen returned to the process of demanding compliance by becoming verbally angry. Out of his own fear of where this might lead and a sense that he was failing to gain compliance, he withdrew from the entire family. He may have hoped that if he showed he was serious about this issue, Darlene and Rebecca might join him and Amy might relent.

Amy seemed to follow the family pattern as well. She expected her father to accept her just as she was, unconditionally. She appeared to have desired a deeper relationship with her father. Her attempt at gaining his attention was to engage in complaints about his apparent lack of acceptance. However, her lack of compliance caused a reciprocal effect

in Stephen in that rather than getting more attention, she received less and perceived her sister as getting more. The timing of Amy's SSA disclosure within weeks of Rebecca's wedding may have been an attempt to redirect attention to her and to gain the power of environmental control.

Each of the family member's cognitive dissonance seems to be present in the clash between a core value and internal feelings of love for their respective children or parents. For Stephen and Darlene's parents, the core values were the external rules centered on religious traditions and rites. The core belief was that failure to perform the prescribed rituals would place the individual in opposition with God, leading to their eternal demise. Their religious upbringing and faith community reinforced these beliefs such that they did not question its veracity. Therefore, they were caught in the struggle between the current relationship with their child and the future condition of the child's soul.

For Stephen and Darlene, the core values were also their religiously based external rules. The core belief was that living a sinful lifestyle was inconsistent with the life of a Christian believer and putting their Christian faith in question. Rather than avoiding sin, Amy seemed to be embracing it. Their religious community and upbringing emphasized that homosexual practices were a sinful choice that was abhorrent to God and violated his design for sexual relations. Therefore, they were caught in the struggle between maintaining a relationship with their daughter and upholding their beliefs so as to help correct their daughter's sinful attitude. They, especially Stephen, felt that sustaining a relationship was to accept the individual's lifestyle choices. He felt it was better for Amy

to experience a temporary separation from the family rather than be eternally separated from God.

For Amy, the core value appears to be her own sexual identity. The core belief may be that a child should find unconditional acceptance by their parents regardless of sexual orientation. Rather than acceptance, Amy may have felt her parents rejected her athletic abilities during childhood and her sexual orientation in young adulthood. Her friends seemed to provide her unconditional acceptance and support. Her parents, especially her father, seemed uncomfortable to even be in her presence. She may have felt it would be better to cling to her friends until her parent's had a change of heart.

Having described the situation in which Stephen and Darlene found themselves and the different perspectives from which they came, the next chapter will describe the therapeutic approach that was taken to help this couple respond to each other in more healthy and productive ways.

CHAPTER 6 – COUNSELING PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

Counseling Process

The type of intervention was marriage counseling, since Stephen and Darlene were seeking help for their marriage and other family members could not or would not make themselves available for counseling. The counseling model chosen was Short-term Structured because the approach to counseling was from a pastoral perspective, and the scope and time to provide intervention to the specific issue needed to be limited due to the counselor's limited availability. The sessions were planned loosely around the pastoral counseling models as presented by Brenner (1992) which utilizes a three-step, four to eight session process of encounter, engage and disengage, and Worthington (2005) which emphasizes interventions that focus on core values and beliefs, communication and correct thinking. The goals for the eight sessions were understanding the problem, clarifying the couple narrative, building proficiency with the speaker-listener skill, hearing and understanding the other's perspective, understanding what motivated their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, encouraging effective behavior responses, considering their progress, and moving forward.

These goals were assessed and evaluated after each session to ensure the needs of the couple were being addressed at a rate they were able to handle. But given their strengths and their openness to allowing someone else into their marriage to provide assistance in this difficult time in their lives, Stephen and Darlene moved through the sessions with relative ease and made excellent progress.

Session one and two were part of the first step: encounter. Prior to session one, the couple was given the materials for the self-reporting tools, Prepare/Enrich and FACES IV. In the first sessions, the initial perspective surrounding the presenting problem was revealed. In order to facilitate this process, the counselor created a safe environment within which the couple could begin to communicate with each other, avoiding pursuer/withdrawer and fight/flight reactions. The counselor was sure to listen carefully and help the couple feel respected and understood; he modeled the Speaker-Listener Technique (Stanley et al., 1988) which he would later help the couple to employ in their conversations. He explained that they would deal with only one problem at a time so as to provide focus and prevent becoming overwhelmed. He also told them that the first two sessions would be dedicated to understanding and clarifying the problem. Once they were clear about and agreed upon the core problem, they would move on to begin addressing it. Most all of the information described in the case study was gathered during these first two sessions. The first session was used to allow the couple to express their story. The second session was used to report the results of the tools, and expand and clarify the unfolding story.

The final element of the encounter step was the diagnosis of the problem. The counselor gathered the pertinent details, analyzed the information and looked for patterns. This component was performed between sessions two and three. From this analysis, the counselor derived a hypothesis that helped address the root of the presenting problem. Then the counselor began to plan the interventions that would be used in the following sessions. The root of the presenting problem seemed to be the couple's inability to adjust

to their daughter's SSA. Their apparent system inflexibility made it difficult for them to change as their family configuration changed. The core issue seemed to be the disagreement over how a parent should respond to a lesbian daughter. The primary symptoms of the problem were stress induced communication and relationship issues. Darlene's core vision was a loving family. Her core belief was that parents show unconditional love to their children. Her motivating cognition was that "without Amy the family is incomplete." Therefore, her response was to fight to get Amy back and protect her from Stephen.

Stephen's core value was eternal salvation. His core belief was that unrepentant sin leads to eternal damnation. His motivating cognitions were that "if Amy continued to live in sin she would go to hell," and "if a parent does not actively stand in opposition to the homosexuality of their children they are silently supporting it." He was familiar with some of the Christian writings that call for action against the "conspiracy to subjugate our children to the homosexual agenda." He blamed Victoria for "taking advantage of Amy's confused condition and turning her into a lesbian."

The primary interventions chosen utilized the cognitive-behavioral couple therapy techniques (Baucom, Epstein, LaTaillade & Kirby, 2008) of operant conditioning (behaviors and consequences) and cognitive perspective (beliefs and behaviors). Natural and logical consequences would be noted to help the individual see that the unwanted behaviors do not achieve their desired goals and present results that are contrary to the goals. Skill-based interventions like Speaker-Listener and problem solving techniques were used as operant conditioning tools. Likewise, incorrect or distorted thinking may

motivate unhelpful behaviors. Guided behavior change interventions like motivational interviewing techniques (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) were used to challenge unhealthy cognitive perspectives.

The engage step began with session three. At the start of the session the counselor outlined the expectations for the remaining sessions. He let the couple know that they would spend five sessions over the next two months working on the issues surrounding their responses to Amy's SSA disclosure. However, for session three the topic of Amy's SSA disclosure was temporarily put aside in order to work on their communication skills. Their strengths were the first things to be addressed, of which this couple had many; they were used to teach the couple how to employ the Speaker-Listener Technique to reinforce effective communication by showing them that they could connect with each other in a significant way. A large felt marker was held by the speaker to indicate they had "the floor" during the conversation. They showed both willingness and genuineness in the Speaker-Listener experiment, and seemed to be encouraged by their own progress.

After the session, the couple was assigned homework; they were to schedule 15 to 30 minutes each day to discuss one topic on the list provided using the Speaker-Listener Technique. The topics were selected from the list of strengths that were observed from the Prepare/Enrich Assessment. The goal was for the couple to practice the skills but also for them to recognize and affirm the tremendous strengths they had in their relationship.

In session four, the dynamics at work in their relationship as observed from Prepare/Enrich and FACES IV were explored. They were used to help them communicate with each other their thoughts and feelings about their families of origin, talk

about their views of the dysfunctional behaviors observed in their families and discover how some of the behaviors they wanted to avoid had appeared in their own family system. They demonstrated persistence in this session as the topics were challenging and each experienced some difficulty listening and reflecting back the speaker's meaning and feelings. However, they did well considering the patterns they had displayed in the initial interviews. They were less likely to interrupt or become defensive. Again, the session was reinforced by encouraging them to continue to explore those things at home in their 15 to 30 minute daily discussions. The goal was for the couple to be able to further hone their communication skills while successfully dealing with more sensitive issues, as well as strengthen their bond as a couple by demonstrating that they could hear and understand each other's differing perspectives.

The fifth session was designed to address the specific reactions of Stephen and Darlene to Amy's SSA. Amy's gender atypical behaviors in childhood and her current lifestyle decisions were explored. Their responses were uncovered and a brainstorming about worse-case scenarios and alternate responses ensued. Their core beliefs were revealed and the impact of these values on their responses to the specific stressful situation was addressed. The goal was to help Stephen and Darlene reframe their reality and help them appreciate the fact that each of them was suffering in their own ways from the loss of both daughters. Further, they needed to know that God loved Amy unconditionally and would not reject her; therefore, they need not feel the need to reject her to achieve reconciliation. The counselor briefly discussed with them the apparent inconsistencies of that concept.

The research on the effects of rejected children and the risks that they faced was used to help them know it was better to keep close to Amy regardless of her life choices. Cutting her off might push her away even further and prevent them from having any voice within her life. Further, the theological concept of homosexuality being a reason for disqualification from heaven was discussed, with the conclusion that it was not within their knowledge as to their daughter's salvation, nor was it their responsibility. The issue was between Amy and God. Their responsibility was to make available a caring and loving environment for Amy that would encourage dependence on God for strength, and that would begin with Stephen and Darlene modeling a total reliance on God and an unconditional love for Amy.

The homework assigned to be completed prior to session six included a series of articles that provided the basis for Chapter 3. Each article was about 5 pages in length. They included research about SSA and its possible biological and environmental origins, and four different evangelical views on the topic of homosexuality and sin. They were instructed to read no more than one article per day and discuss what they had learned using their 15 to 30 minute discussion times.

During session six, the counselor asked for a brief report on what they had learned from their reading and discussion during the prior weeks. They reported that they had a better appreciation about the complexity of SSA and found that they found it difficult to find a single theological position on which to stand. Stephen was especially impressed by the various authors' "genuine desire to prove their point using Scripture rather than human

reasoning." They said that they had "more questions now than we did before we read these articles."

Stephen and Darlene were challenged to consider as many alternative responses and behaviors as they could. Each idea was discussed and consequences examined. With each response they were to reflect on the worse case scenario and the best case scenario. This was to encourage them to consider all aspects of a response. From this discussion, they were able to produce two responses that they could both agree upon: show Amy unconditional love and discuss with Amy their fears about her SSA. The counselor questioned them about their readiness to begin this process. They appeared to be in the contemplation stage of change so the counselor used motivational interviewing techniques to challenge and move them toward the planning stage.

The core principle on which motivational interviewing was based can be found in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984). This theory suggests that when it comes to change, individuals move along the various stages of precontemplation, contemplation, planning, implementing and maintaining. The goal in motivational interviewing is to help the individual or group to move forward in the process and avoid being stuck in the change process. The counselor's hope was that Stephen and Darlene would change the way they were communicating with each other and their daughter. He challenged them to move from contemplation about reconnecting with Amy to planning on meeting and talking with her. This involved expressing empathy about the difficulty of the change, developing discrepancy by helping the couple to consider positive

reasons for change, and encouraging the couple to begin planning to make the change (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

The homework assigned to be completed prior to the seventh session was to consider the following questions: (1) What are the various ways we could approach Amy; (2) What would be the possible consequences if we used that approach; (3) How would we handle that consequence; and (4) Which approach seems to be the best one for us? The goal was to encourage the couple to take action together in planning their effort to repair the relationship with their daughter.

Session seven marked the beginning of the disengage step and was used to evaluate Stephen and Darlene's progress. They reported that they had agreed to invite Amy to the house to talk over dinner. They planned to confess their prior ignorance about SSA and their beliefs that motivated them to respond the way they did. They would assure Amy that they loved her and nothing about her or her choices would change that. They would share with Amy their fears about her lifestyle and ask her to be patient with them. They had not set the date but they were ready to do so.

They both felt much less stress; however, they were still worrying about their respective families of origin and how they were accepting Amy's lifestyle. Boundary issues with their families could have been another issue addressed by counseling. Stephen reported that he was sleeping better and he was ready to discuss the situation with his pastor. Darlene said that they did not fight anymore; they "discussed passionately." She laughed. Both Stephen and Darlene had talked to Amy during the past week via telephone and were trying to assure her that they loved her regardless. Apparently, Amy was

skeptical but Stephen and Darlene were patiently waiting for her to see that they were sincere. They hoped they would be consistent and persistent in their communication with her. Considering their progress, they suggested that counseling end rather than schedule one last session. Instead, they would contact the counselor with an update after one month by telephone.

About six weeks later, Darlene called and reported that they had their dinner with Amy, and while it felt a bit awkward during their meeting, their relationship had since improved and Amy was calling about once a week. She said Amy still seemed a bit skeptical, but "she's softening" and that it was most apparent in her interactions with Stephen; "she smiles when they are talking together." Darlene promised to call again if there were any "break-throughs."

Process Outcomes

As previously stated, a genogram is a snapshot of a family's relationship connections within and across generations for a specific point in time. Stephen and Darlene's genogram would look quite different as of this writing. It appears that the more loving posture demonstrated by Stephen and Darlene towards Amy has affected their relationship; it seems that they are becoming closer and trusting each other more as Amy continues to experience a loving acceptance from her parents. It also appears to have had an impact on Amy's relationship with Victoria.

Apparently, since Amy was not fully depending on Victoria for her support, their relationship weakened and Victoria asked Amy to leave. That left Amy in a vulnerable position. She had recently been laid-off from her job and had no income of her own; she

was jobless and homeless. The information provided during Stephen and Darlene's counseling sessions helped them to appreciate the risk factors for homeless children with SAA, so they came to the conclusion that it was more important to care for Amy by welcoming her home than to maintain an appearance of opposing homosexuality. Additionally, it appeared that Amy had shifted back towards sexual identity confusion (Degges-White & Myers, 2005) as she began to question her SSA. This will provide Stephen and Darlene an opportunity to have open dialogue with Amy and help her through this confusing time in her life. It remains to be seen whether Amy's SSA and disclosure was a veiled attempt at gaining attention or establishing control over the family system.

Recommendations for Future Inquiry

The lack of resources and research surrounding helping Christian families who are dealing with lesbian daughters points to the great need for further investigation into this topic. Most of the literature that addresses the matter from a Christian perspective is not research based. Most of the research based literature is cynical about the ability of the Christian community to help families with LGB children. Therefore, pastors and Christian counselors are left to their own devices when seeking to help these families. It is this author's hope that others will perceive the gap and begin to fill it with scholarly research. If the Church is to remain true to the message of the Gospel, then we need help to consistently show the love of Christ and the need for a Savior.

More research is needed to address the specific responses of parents to lesbian daughters. This thesis has hypothesized that the family and social expectations of

daughters are significantly different from sons based upon a variety of observations made within family therapy literature. Is this true, and if so, what are these expectations and how do they impact the way families respond to SSA in daughters?

Little has been written addressing the challenges faced by parents of LGB adolescents and young adults. The combined stresses of family life-stage change and the SSA disclosure of a child would seem to place a family system at higher risk for dysfunctional thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Research on this topic would benefit the families and the mental health communities by helping them understand the possible risks.

Another area of research that would be beneficial would be an in-depth study of the church as a support system for families with LGB children. There are several secular groups that are helping parents and families; these groups are often the primary source for research subjects. However, there are faith-based groups and church support groups scattered across the country. What is their perspective on helping families? What types of interventions do they provide? These and questions like them would be of great benefit to pastors and Christian counselors who are seeking to provide the needed support for these families.

Conclusion

This family provided an important case study because they were dealing with a common problem faced by many Christians today; how do we approach the topic of homosexuality from the perspective of the family of a LGB child? We were not dealing with hypothetical ideas or theological constructs; we were dealing with real people struggling with a real dilemma. I found that predefined arguments and scripted therapies
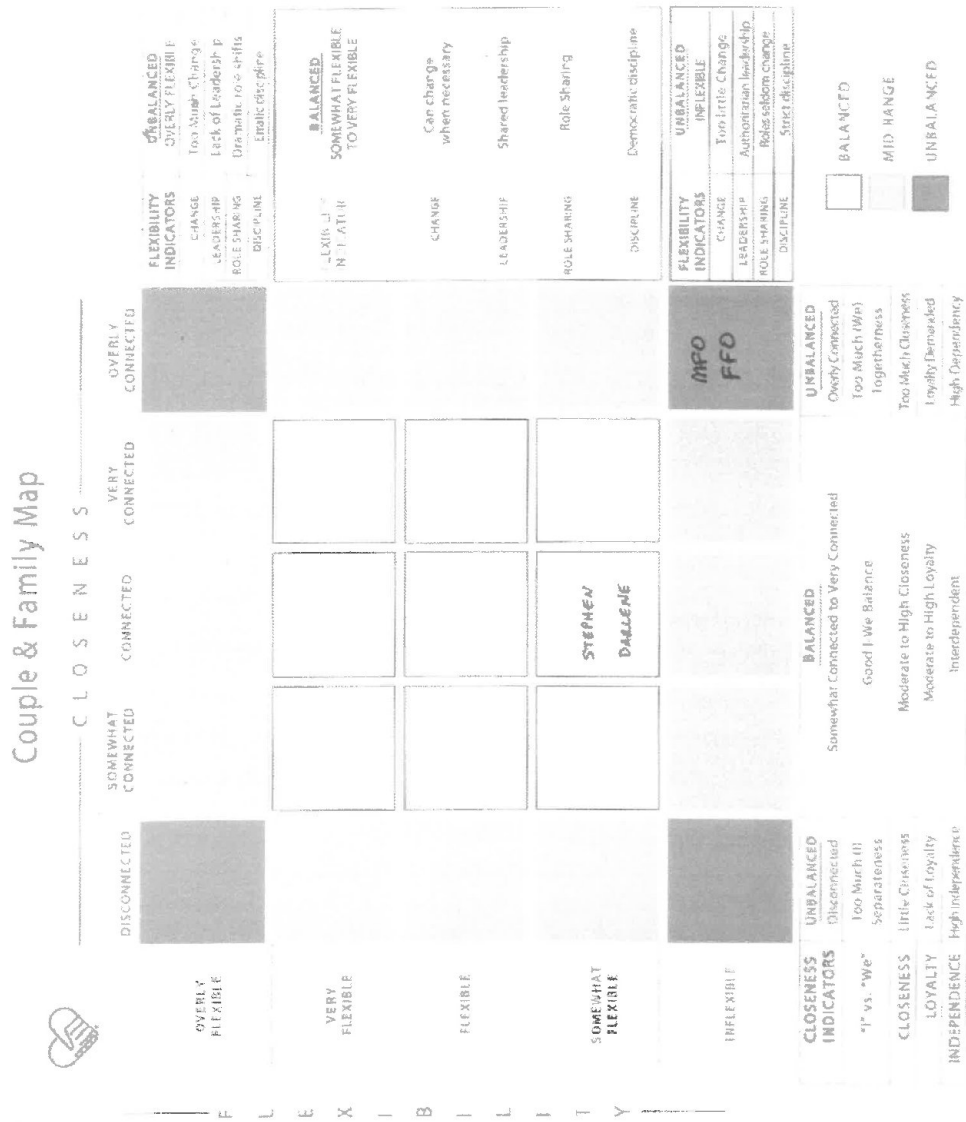
did not seem appropriate when counseling this couple; however, they were helpful in guiding the process. The structured short-term model helped focus efforts on the issue I felt would make the greatest impact toward healthy functioning in the family.

This thesis revealed that while it is helpful to have a strong faith, it is equally important to have an accurately informed faith. I discovered that when a person has a strong understanding about the nature of homosexuality and the development of SSA it helps that person to deal more compassionately with a LGB individual. Educating the parents about the currently available information pertaining to the biological and environmental origins of homosexuality proved helpful in assisting the parents to consider the possibility that Amy's SSA was a complex issue that grew out of a multiplicity of factors rather than just a sinful decision.

I have found that healthy functioning of the family system depends on their ability to communicate effectively; keeping open lines of positive communication husband to wife and parent to child is crucial to their ability to adjust to system change. It defends the marriage from serious conflict and increases the feeling of acceptance for their LGB children.

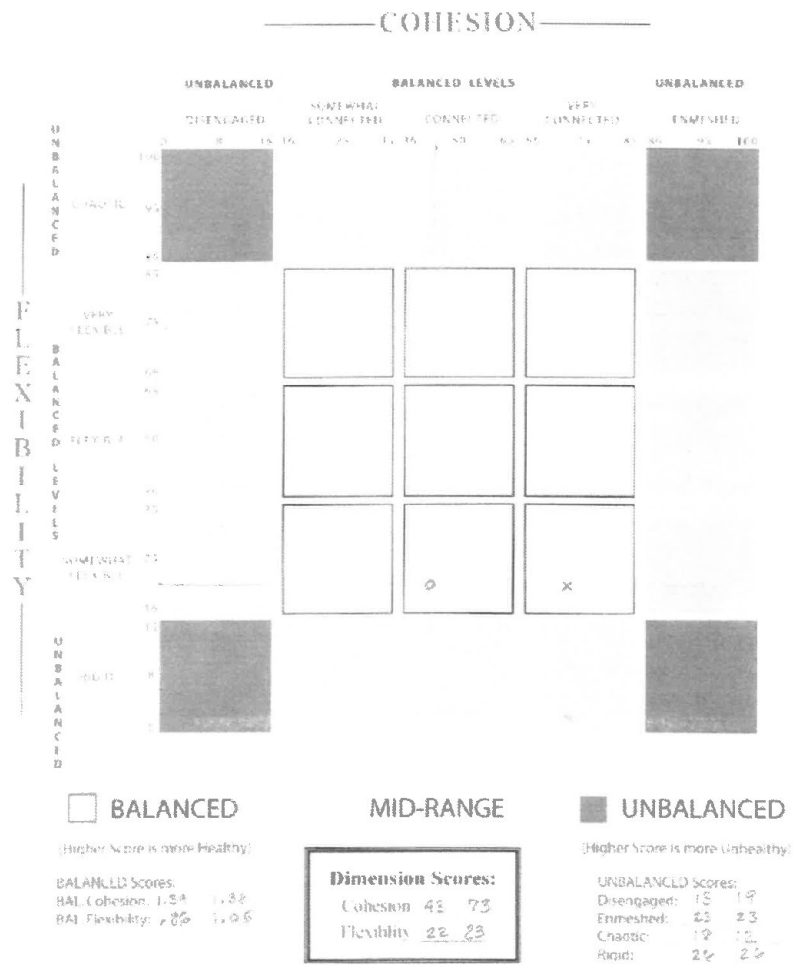I have also found that the unconditional love of a parent for a child best replicates the love that God has for his children and most effectively helps mitigate some of the negative effects on the LGB child. Unqualified acceptance of a child by a parent provides a clear defense against many of the perils facing LGB children. A parental support is a major factor in preventing LGB children from predation.
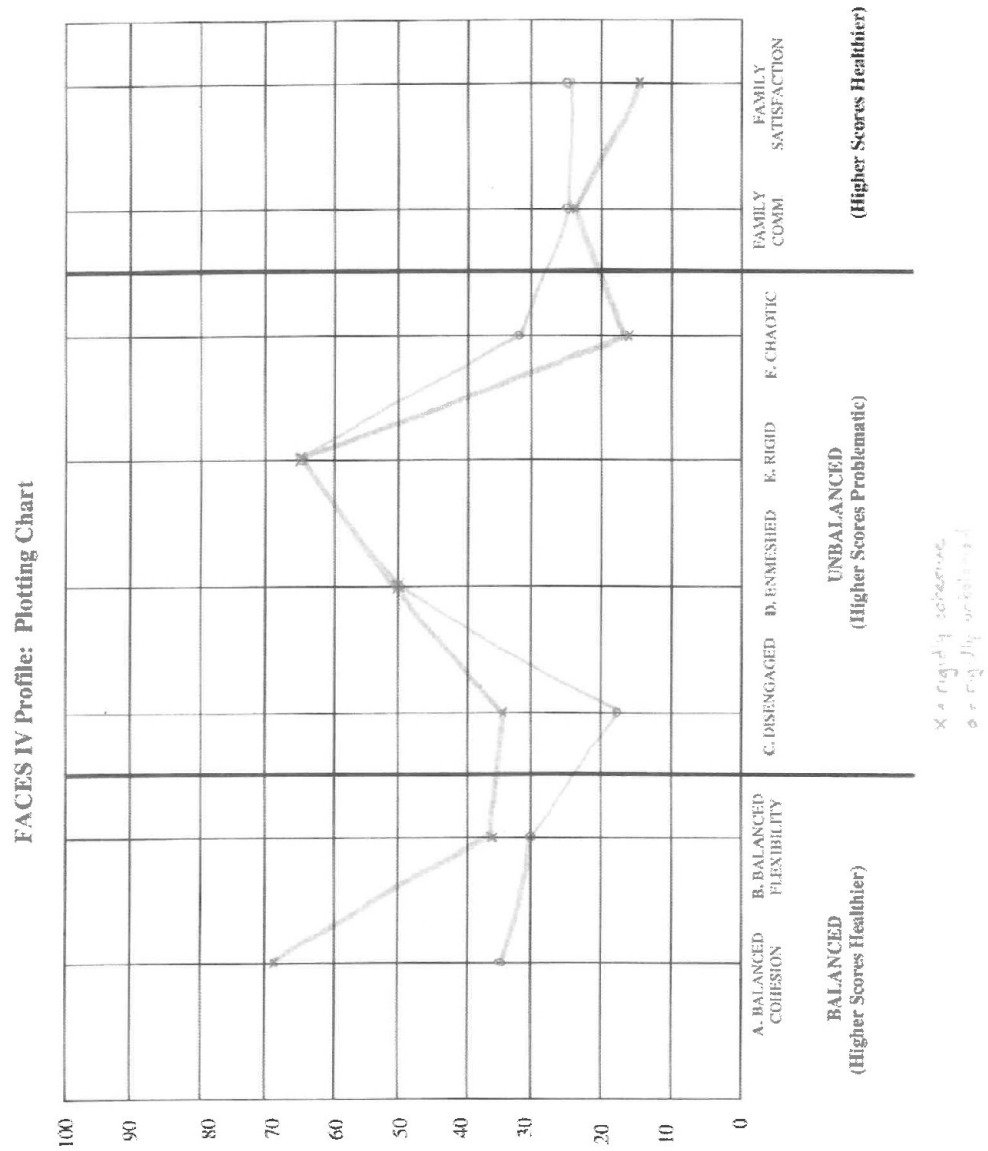
APPENDIX 1: COUPLE AND FAMILY CIRCUMPLEX MODEL

Couple & Family Map

CLOSENESS

DISCONNECTED · SOMEWHAT CONNECTED · CONNECTED · VERY CONNECTED · OVERLY CONNECTED

F L E X I B I L I T Y

OVERLY FLEXIBLE

VERY FLEXIBLE

FLEXIBLE

SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE

INFLEXIBLE

STEPHEN
DARLENE

FLEXIBILITY INDICATORS	UNBALANCED OVERLY FLEXIBLE	BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE
CHANGE	Too Much Change	Can change when necessary
LEADERSHIP	Lack of Leadership	Shared leadership
ROLE SHARING	Dramatic role shifts	Role Sharing
DISCIPLINE	Erratic discipline	Democratic discipline

FLEXIBILITY INDICATORS	UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE
CHANGE	Too Little Change
LEADERSHIP	Authoritarian leadership
ROLE SHARING	Roles seldom change
DISCIPLINE	Strict discipline

BALANCED
MID RANGE
UNBALANCED

	UNBALANCED Overly Connected
	Too Much (We)
	Togetherness
CLOSENESS	Too Much Closeness
LOYALTY	Loyalty Demanded
INDEPENDENCE	High Dependency

	BALANCED Somewhat Connected to Very Connected
	Good I-We Balance
	Moderate to High Closeness
	Moderate to High Loyalty
	Interdependent

CLOSENESS INDICATORS	UNBALANCED Disconnected
"I" vs. "We"	Too Much (I)
	Separateness
CLOSENESS	Little Closeness
LOYALTY	Lack of Loyalty
INDEPENDENCE	High Independence

APPENDIX 2: CIRCUMPLEX MODEL & FACES IV

Circumplex Model & FACES IV

www.facesiv.com

APPENDIX 3: FACES IV PROFILE

FACES IV Profile: Plotting Chart

APPENDIX 4: GENOGRAM

Emotional Relationships

4 Cutoff / Estranged
1 Indifferent / Apathetic
1 Friendship / Close
12 Fused
1 Focused On
1 Discord / Conflict
1 Distrust
2 Harmony
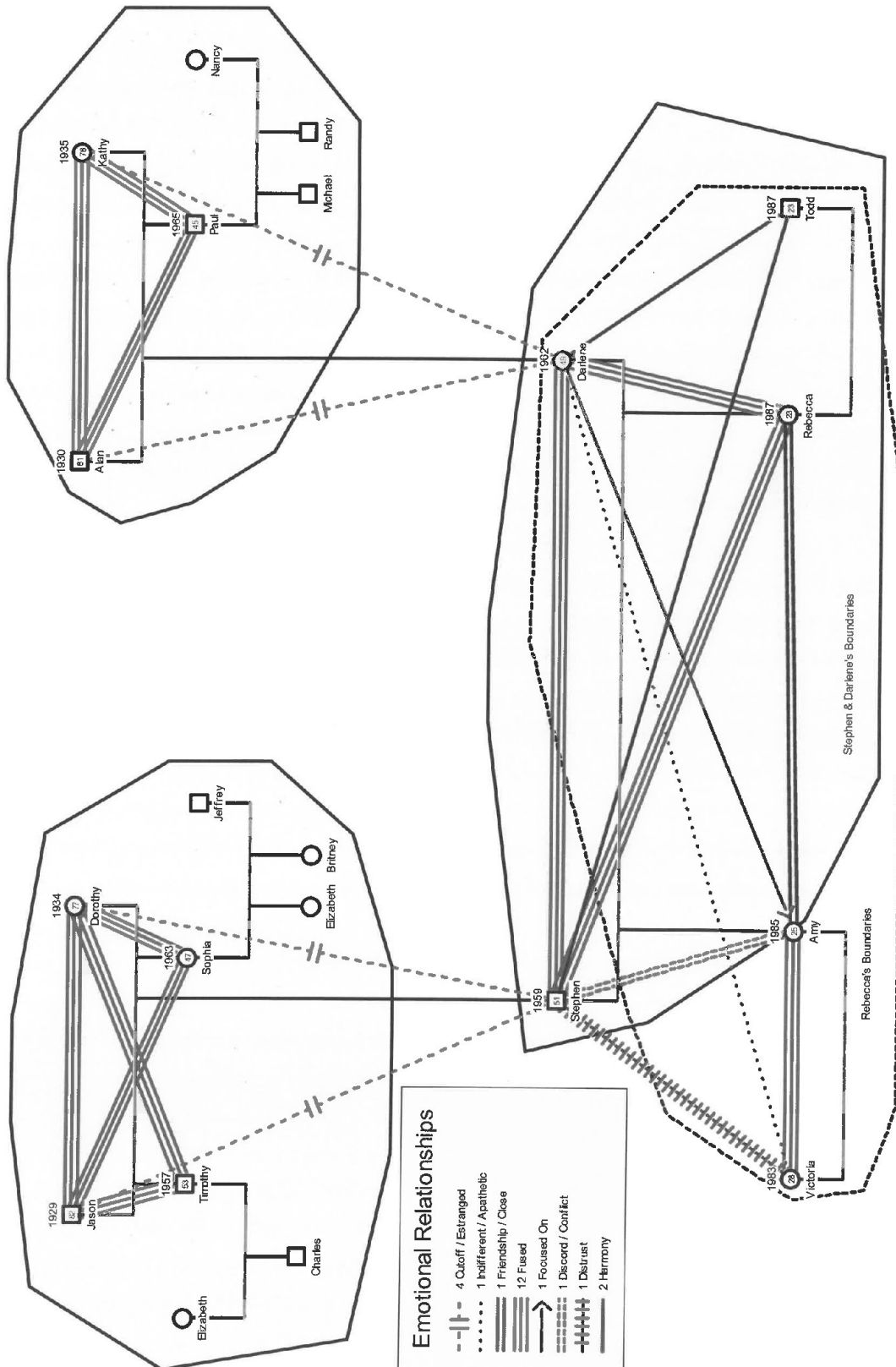
APPENDIX 5: COGNITIVE DISSONANCE RESPONSE MODEL

Cognitive Dissonance Response Model					
Family Tier	Conflicting Values	Core Beliefs	Triggering Events	Controlling Behaviors	Reciprocal Effects
Family of Origin	Faith Rituals vs. Relationship with couple	The Sacraments of the Church protect one from unforgivable sins.	Couple's Church attendance Couple's Marriage No Baptism of Grandchildren	Anger/Threats Guilt/Shame Cut-off or Withdrawal Denial or Avoidance	Couple - separated further from FO - less family disclosure - sensitive topics avoided
Couple	Prohibited lifestyle vs. Relationship with daughter	Living a sinful lifestyle is inconsistent with a Christian lifestyle and puts in question true conversion.	Daughter's gender atypical activities Daughter's SSA disclosure	Anger/Threats Guilt/Shame Withdrawal Denial or Avoidance	Daughter - resentment - avoided sexual attraction conversations - possible power-play in timing of SSA disclosure - feelings of alienation - seeking acceptance from others
Couple	Resolution of conflict vs. Marital relationship	A good marriage does not experience severe conflict.	Daughter's SSA disclosure	Pursuit/Withdrawal Conflict avoidance	Couple - inability to resolve disputes - attempts to build alliances - fear of losing faith community respect/position - portraying that good marriages don't have conflict - distrust they would find acceptance/support - nearly lost job
Daughter	Sexual identity vs. Relationship with couple	Parents should always give their children unconditional love and acceptance.	Couple's prohibition of activities Couple's apparent lack of acceptance Pending wedding of accepted sister	Moodiness Complaining Anger/Threats Guilt/Shame Withdrawal Avoidance	Couple - conflicting with each other - avoiding the topic - apparent feeling of helplessness

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VITA

Robert W. Samsel was born in Hershey, Pennsylvania on March 21, 1959. He was educated in the public schools of Bristol, Connecticut. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Management Information Systems from Central Connecticut State University (1993) and earned the Master of Divinity degree from Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota (2001). He began his Doctor of Ministry work in January 2008 and anticipates graduating in May 2012 with the Doctor of Ministry degree in Marriage and Family Counseling from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Robert was ordained to the work of Gospel ministry at Grace Baptist Church in Bristol, Connecticut (2001) and holds ordination standing with the Baptist General Conference. He held denominational appointments to the district board of trustees and the camping committee. He has been certified by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary as a student mentor and holds a certification as a Prepare/Enrich Counselor through Life Innovations, Inc.

Robert has served in a number of roles in lay-leadership and pastoral ministries in the local church between 1985 and the present. These roles have included Deacon Chairman and various committee memberships, Associate Pastor at Grace Baptist Church in Bristol, Connecticut (1995–2001), and Minister of Christian Education at North Shore Community Baptist Church in Beverly, Massachusetts (2001–2008). He has also served as guest preacher and teacher for several churches and organizations.

Robert was married to his wife, Dawn, August, 7 1982. They have two grown children, Christina and William, and one granddaughter, Rachel.